

Leisure Time For Unemployed Youth Field Study In The City Of Sabra - Tlemcen

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Received: 01/2024

Published: 09/2024

Abstract:

Sociological studies have rapidly developed and significantly expanded, encompassing entirely new areas of research and study related to the nature of the contemporary era in which we live. The study of leisure in sociology is a clear example of this. In the past, leisure was considered a minor topic within sociology, which itself focused on the study of youth in terms of their attitudes, thought patterns and social movements. In fact, when sociology studies leisure, it does so as a social phenomenon related to the lives of individuals and groups that make up the social organisation of society as a whole.

The focus of this paper is to diagnose and analyse the phenomenon of leisure among unemployed youth, based on their perceptions of leisure and how they spend it. It aims to answer the following questions How do unemployed young people spend their leisure time? What are their preferred activities?

Firstly, our analysis is based on understanding the perspective of the youth in Sabra on leisure time through the field research we conducted to uncover the main driving factors and to study their attitudes and thought patterns.

Keywords: Youth, Unemployment, Leisure, Perceptions, City, Sabra.

Introduction:

Since independence, Algerian youth has been a subject of little importance and attention by researchers, and has been neglected in scientific fields. However, after the events of October 1988, studies and attempts to understand this social group, which has experienced a high rate of demographic growth to the extent that it has become a true youth republic, began to emerge, raising several questions for Algerian administrators regarding their diverse social, cultural and economic needs.

When addressing the issue of youth, we encounter recurring synonyms such as: repression and deprivation, marginalisation, social, cultural and sexual misery, as well as political and religious intolerance. This leads to the perception that this group is dangerous, impulsive and anxious in its demands, rebellious against political, religious and social systems. In the

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social and scientific imagination, they are firmly established as agents of change, revolution and transformation, as is often the case in Arab and Algerian socio-political texts³.

Based on this, the historical approach confirms that youth is a contemporary phenomenon and a challenge to authority, as they face socio-economic problems such as unemployment, drug abuse, delinquency and violence. Unemployment, on the other hand, is another phenomenon closely linked to young people who do not engage in any activity due to the lack of jobs or employment opportunities. This situation is well known and represents the lived reality within the personal trajectories of individuals in the labour market. It reflects a commonly used colloquial term, "haytist", which refers to a state of psychological unpreparedness to benefit from the various scientific, cultural and artistic activities offered by youth structures, leading to a passive experience of time rather than active engagement.

This situation is one of the psychosocial problems associated with the time observed among young people, who perceive their time as wasted due to sudden changes in their living conditions. Unemployment, like an illness, robs time of its essence and creates discomfort, anxiety and a sense of emptiness. This leads us to the core idea of our study, which aims to explore the relationship between unemployed young people and their social environment, to clarify how they define the concept of leisure in relation to specific activities or defined behaviours. In addition, the study seeks to identify the significant factors that influence their attitudes, needs and ways of spending their leisure time.

The focus of this article is to diagnose and analyse the phenomenon based on young people's perceptions of leisure time and how they spend it, in order to answer the following questions: How do unemployed young people spend their leisure time? What are their preferred activities?

Preliminary analysis

Firstly, our analysis is based on understanding the perspective of the youth in Sabra City regarding leisure time through the field research we conducted to uncover the main driving factors and to study their attitudes and thought patterns.

Leisure and related concepts

Leisure is associated with the availability of free time, time that is not occupied by work responsibilities, or time in which we can engage in activities that fulfil personal desires or satisfy individual needs. It is time that we use in ways that we like, according to our own choices. When studying leisure in relation to the concept of time, it is essential to distinguish between two types of time: the first type is known as "real leisure", which reflects a free, self-directed choice; the second type is known as "forced leisure", which refers to periods that one is forced to endure, such as the time spent after retirement, despite a genuine desire to continue working⁴.

This distinction raises the relationship of time to both play and work, which are the two main aspects of social life that we focus on when studying the concept of leisure. Play, however, remains a concept that is not fully understood, despite numerous attempts to analyse it. Generally speaking, it refers to spontaneous, direct and free expressions and movements that are always a source of joy and pleasure. It is difficult to define a typical image of play because it is relative and depends on two factors: age and time. It is therefore not the same as leisure.

Leisure is a broader concept than time itself, encompassing a variety of activities, including play, which serve different functions for people at different stages of their lives⁵. However,

³- RARRBO Kamel: *Algeria and its Youth*, Editions L'Harmattan, 5-7, Paris, p. 40.

⁴- Mohamed Ali Mohamed: *Leisure in Modern Society*, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 1985, p. 86.

⁵- *Ibid*, p. 87.

focusing on leisure and play does not mean neglecting work, which is essential for prosperity, growth and progress.

According to a sociological dictionary, leisure is defined as “the surplus time remaining after deducting from the twenty-four hours the time allotted for work, sleep and other necessities⁶”.

Leisure and cultural values

There is no doubt that the experience of leisure and recreation varies across societies and cultures and between individuals and groups. This variability is due to the diversity of factors and circumstances that influence this experience. When sociologists use the term “social system”, they refer not only to the various organisations or institutions in society, but also to the “set of ethical rules, roles, cultural beliefs and prevailing values within a given group or community that govern human behaviour⁷”.

Alain Touraine draws a distinction between “positive leisure” and “negative leisure”, in other words between elite culture and mass culture. His attempt is to associate positive leisure with elite culture and negative leisure with mass culture. He believes that human activity is determined by the individual’s position within the social hierarchy⁸.

We can conclude that leisure has functions in the construction of society, primarily related to the activities that individuals engage in during their daily lives. The ways in which leisure is spent vary according to needs and satisfactions, and the meanings attached to leisure vary according to gender and social class. Moreover, the successful use of leisure is one that regards time as a valuable asset not to be wasted.

It is important to note that leisure has little meaning for people who are not engaged in work, and it lacks value if one cannot enjoy it

The concept of youth

Scientific and intellectual efforts in the Arab world on youth are relatively limited. The study of youth issues has not reached the level of scientific specialisation and often remains exploratory and descriptive, fragmented and situational. In contrast, advanced societies have recognised the importance of youth as social actors in processes of social change.

The term ‘youth’ is problematic; it can be seen as merely a word that is frequently used in different fields of interest. It appears in social, economic, psychological and educational studies and has gained prominence in political discourse and the mass media. Because of its multiple uses, the word has acquired different meanings, sometimes leading to confusion and ambiguity in interpretation⁹.

Many studies tend to narrow the concept of youth, reducing it to an age group or a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. The challenge, however, is to clarify the boundaries of this group and its social position. Defining youth on the basis of biological criteria appears to be imprecise and subject to confusion and disagreement.

These discrepancies in biological and chronological definitions continue when discussing the end of adolescence. For neurologists, adolescence ends at the age of twenty, when the nervous system is fully developed, whereas growth specialists may define it as ending at the age of twenty-five. Each discipline has its own criteria: for judges it is based on criminal

⁶- Ibid, p. 93.

⁷- Ibid, p. 159

⁸- Ibid, p. 126.

⁹- Al-Munji Al-Zaydi: Introductions to the Sociology of Youth, Al-Fikr Magazine, Vol. 30, No. 3, January - March, Kuwait, 2002, p. 28.

responsibility, and for educators it is determined by the end of compulsory education at the age of sixteen. Thus, the biological definition varies according to the field of specialisation.

In contrast to biological and psychological definitions of this age phase, which present biological or psychological adolescence as a universal and fixed stage, sociological analysis defines adolescence according to social classes and gender within specific societies at specific times. The sociological approach suggests that age is a 'social construct' that evolves over time and takes different forms depending on the social context.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu recognises a general tendency in sociology to regard the boundaries between age groups as arbitrary. We do not know exactly where youth ends and old age begins; the boundaries between youth and old age have always been a "site of struggle"¹⁰.

Youth, like old age, is an imprecise age category. All attempts to define it are linked to different circumstances, events and calculations, some of which are economic and related to the labour market and its nature, as well as to pathways into work. Sociological definitions tend to extract common characteristics between groups of young people, while emphasising social differences in terms of class and social origin. Thus, there is a "youth society" whose characteristics are outlined within the wider society, as Balandier put it.

Intergenerational relations are a fundamental element of the social system, characterised by two main features:

1. **Dependence:** This is biological in the early stages of life and manifests itself in the child's attachment to its parents. This dependency is later transformed into social dependency through the processes of socialisation and education.
2. **Conflict:** This occurs between successive generations and goes beyond personal conflicts within the family to become social conflicts¹¹.

In conclusion, the definition of youth is a social reality defined by society for a generation that includes age groups that are close in age but different in terms of gender and social affiliation. They share the experience of going through socialisation processes and are in a phase of preparation or anticipation for entering social life.

The concept of unemployment

In general, there are two essential conditions that must be met in order to define an unemployed person according to official statistics:

1. **Ability to work:** The person must be able to work.
2. **Active job search:** the person must be actively seeking employment.

On this basis, economists and experts, following the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation, define an unemployed person as: "anyone who is able to work, willing to work, actively seeking work and ready to accept a job at the prevailing wage level, but without success". This definition applies both to persons entering the labour market for the first time and to those who have previously worked but have been forced to leave it for various reasons¹².

Figure

¹⁰- Al-Munji Al-Zaydi, *ibid*, pp. 29-30-31.

¹¹- Al-Munji Al-Zaydi, *previous reference*, pp. 33-34.

¹²- Ramzi Zaki: *The Political Economy of Unemployment*, National Office for Culture and Arts, Kuwait, 1978, p. 17.

Unemployed

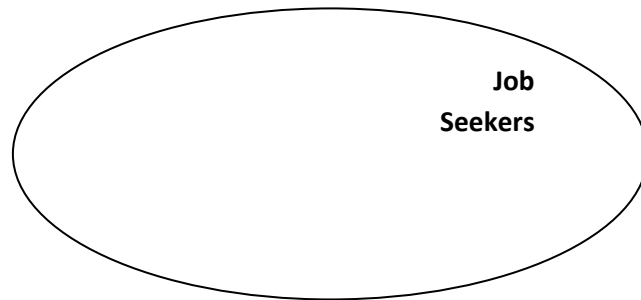


Figure 01: Clarifying the category of the unemployed

This figure illustrates that the unemployed are not a homogeneous group, but consist of several categories that differ in terms of unemployment rates, duration of unemployment and the level of suffering caused by unemployment itself. There are many bases for classifying the unemployed, such as gender, urban-rural status, age or ethnicity¹³.

Youth representations of leisure in Sabra

Through our field study, we aimed to provide realistic insights into the concept of leisure and its meaning from the perspective of unemployed youth. This perspective comes from their intellectual point of view and seeks to identify some indicators that would allow us to approach their representations of leisure. We selected a cross-sectional sample of one hundred unemployed young people from different social backgrounds, ensuring a diversity of locations and neighbourhoods within the Sabra area of Tlemcen. The perceptions of each unemployed youth may vary from place to place, reflecting the general concepts these young people hold about leisure time, which is an important starting point for understanding their attitudes towards this issue.

The young people's responses were varied, but most of them converged on a few key themes, including: hatred, boredom, routine and the feeling that time was being wasted. These feelings were followed by despair, loss of hope, excessive contemplation, lack of identity, inactivity, difficulties in interacting with others and the onset of physical ailments due to psychological stress.

The leisure time experienced by these unemployed youth is, as Mohamed Ali Mohamed¹⁴ puts it, "forced time", which they have no choice but to endure. This contrasts with voluntary leisure time, which is freely chosen, leading to a lack of constructive investment in their time. The result is frustration in meeting their needs and a sense of dissatisfaction, making it a source of anxiety, stress and boredom. For some, this negative leisure time can lead to increased involvement in substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs, as confirmed by several respondents in our interviews who expressed sentiments such as "I'm fed up with this situation and tired of being unemployed. How can I fill my time?"

Boredom arises from unoccupied time, characterised by the absence of any organised activity, resulting in monotony. Unemployment, like illness, robs time of its essence, making it devoid of value and meaning.

It is also important to note the accompanying feelings of hatred that correlate with boredom, as expressed by the respondents. This hatred stems from an inability to accept their current circumstances and reflects their dissatisfaction and resentment with the reality they live in. This leads to difficulties in interacting with their social environment, which creates a heavy psychological burden due to the lack of necessary facilities and places to spend their leisure

¹³- PISSART F., PONCELET M., VOISIN M.: French Review of Sociology, "Living in Unemployment", ED CNRS, October - December, 1990, p. 23.

¹⁴- Mohamed Ali Mohamed, previous reference, p. 35.

time. In particular, there is a lack of spaces for unemployed young people in the Sabra area, mainly because the region is predominantly agricultural.

Moreover, the cycles of repetition, isolation, stagnation and lack of renewal mean that these young people struggle to make effective use of their leisure time. As a result, it becomes “killing time” without purpose or goal. As one respondent put it: “I do nothing; I have no value in this society”.

Almost all unemployed young people have a negative view of leisure time, seeing it merely as a way of “passing time” or “killing time”. This perspective stems mainly from their intellectual framework, cultural awareness and the socio-economic environment that has shaped such ideas. They often devote most of their leisure time to spiritual pursuits, believing that what they cannot achieve in work and daily life can be realised through worship and religious devotion. This is illustrated by the response of one participant who said: “We pray and go to the mosque so that God will grant us success”.

The relationship between family education and living standards and leisure time

We can link the emergence of such behavioural patterns among unemployed youth to the educational level of their parents, which is closely related to cultural awareness. Many respondents reported that their mothers did not have a sufficient level of education to provide their children with the necessary skills to manage their leisure time effectively. Similarly, fathers often lack the necessary educational background due to their daily work commitments, which are primarily focused on earning a living and meeting the needs of the family. As a result, they have little awareness of leisure and how to use it.

When we talk about the family, we are referring to the socially acceptable behaviours that a child learns, including when, how and with whom they play, and how they should behave in different situations. The home is the place where family members engage in certain activities such as watching television, reading, pursuing hobbies, relaxing and resting.

In addition, the standard of living and average income of the families of the young people surveyed illustrate the direct link between purchasing power and spending on leisure activities. This link explains how limited family income and difficult financial situations create barriers to understanding how to invest leisure time effectively.

The results of this study show that young people are significantly influenced by their family’s perspective and approach to leisure time, which is often seen as a waste of time. This leads to the belief that it is impossible for children to learn the importance of leisure time, resulting in a low level of awareness of its value.

The education system and leisure

Another factor that emerges from the analysis of respondents’ narratives in this study is the failure of the educational system to develop young people’s ability to spend their leisure time effectively. In the early years of education, the focus has been solely on learning and memorisation, with little emphasis on diverse activities such as theatre, literature, art, music, poetry and other cultural expressions that have intrinsic value. These activities could help nurture interests, develop talents and improve overall tastes¹⁵, thus facilitating the effective use of leisure time.

The sense of despair among the youth of Sabra can be attributed to misunderstandings and weaknesses in their upbringing and education, which have contributed to a pervasive sense of hopelessness. This condition is characteristic of many young people today and leads to a lack of confidence and fear in the future. As a result, these young people find themselves in need of guidance in a world filled with feelings of alienation. This situation is exacerbated by the rise of extremist ideas, as the lack of fulfilling opportunities leads them

¹⁵- Mohamed Ali Mohamed: *Leisure in Modern Society*, previous reference*, p. 192.

to adopt a hostile attitude towards society and official institutions, often turning to informal and unofficial channels for support.

Leisure spaces of unemployed youth

When we ask the youth of this semi-urban city and its rural areas, “Where do you spend your leisure time?”, we find that most young men prefer to spend their leisure time in cafes. These cafes serve as public spaces where different members of the community gather and function as socio-economic arenas for buying and selling. Here, young people spend much of their time trying to fill the emptiness of their days. The only activity they engage in is sitting in these cafes, drinking coffee with friends and smoking cigarettes. As one respondent said of this social space: “Coffee and some gossip is better than the Sultan in his house”.

This sentiment, shared by many unemployed youth, gives them a sense of masculinity and belonging when they visit these places. The cafes host people from different social classes and cultural backgrounds, facilitating interaction, knowledge sharing and the spread of information and rumours. It resembles a social media platform where conversations revolve around a range of topics, including politics, economics and sports. In this way, the café has become a forum for communication and a means of spending or ‘killing’ time, often accompanied by games such as backgammon and cards, which provide a brief respite from their daily struggles.

However, some young people resort to other ways of spending their leisure time, such as the affluent elite, which can encourage drug use and addiction.

Some young people prefer to stay at home, watching television and reading, a tendency that is particularly common among young girls. These girls often stay indoors due to prevailing local values and norms that restrict their movements and prohibit them from going out freely, in stark contrast to their peers in urban areas. The prevailing custom in this community dictates that a girl’s place is at home, forcing her to adapt to the imposed reality. Their social interactions are limited to neighbours and relatives, often through casual conversations on rooftops.

The preference of these young people to stay at home may be due to a desire to distance themselves from others, which we believe minimises their spending due to a lack of income to meet their needs. Others choose to spend their time on the streets, wandering aimlessly through alleys and side streets. They often use the walls as resting places to sit and chat for long periods with peers of the same age. This behaviour is accompanied by various social interactions, including flirting, taunting and teasing.

In addition, their late-night activities can sometimes take on a hedonistic character, leading them to consume drugs and alcohol as a temporary relief from their daily burdens. These substances allow them to escape the weight of their reality, transporting them from a world of worries and problems to a realm of fantasy characterised by pleasure, joy and recreation.

Some young people choose to navigate the online world to chat with girls from across the seas, hoping to connect with attractive individuals from the other side and fulfil the idealised image they have long imagined. This creates a dynamic interaction between young people through virtual communication.

Some young people say they spend their leisure time playing sports in playgrounds, while others join youth clubs and associations. As noted, “disoriented young people seek refuge in groups which allow them to benefit temporarily from several advantages:

- **Group identity:** This compensates for their lack of social identity.
- **Security:** the group reduces their anxiety, since loneliness often breeds strength.

- Reduced responsibility: The group addresses the individual's psychological issues and often guides them in activities they may find difficult to undertake alone¹⁶.

Our interviews revealed that some young people prefer to spend their leisure time in mosques, seeking psychological stability and spiritual balance. In addition to being places of worship and religious practice, mosques serve as centres that attract large numbers of community members, especially youth. One respondent highlighted the role of the mosque in organising leisure time through structured programmes, offering classes, seminars and producing wall magazines that reinforce their religious values.

Some young people spend their leisure time on family land, which has a cultural significance that is deeply rooted in their upbringing. Parents instill in their children the belief that family honour is tied to the land, as reflected in the adage: "To neglect one's land is to neglect one's honour". The land serves as a bridge between successive generations and is seen as a family treasure, emphasising its importance, expansion, heritage and status within the local community.

Interests of unemployed youth in leisure activities

Interviews and surveys with young people about their preferred leisure activities revealed a wide range of practices. Among the most common are watching television programmes and satellite channels, reading newspapers, domestic activities such as cleaning, cooking and sewing, and visiting relatives.

These practices can be interpreted as being related to their moods and psychological states. Their interests and activities are influenced by their mental well-being. The amount of time they spend watching television and films has been found to reflect their leisure interests. The phenomenon of increased viewing can be attributed to the large amount of free time available to these young people, coupled with the lack of employment opportunities, which creates time gaps that television serves to fill. Television has become one of the most important means of engagement, overshadowing other forms of entertainment such as going to the cinema or listening to the radio.

When we sought to understand the implications of young people's viewing habits through our discussions with respondents, they emphasised that watching television programmes and satellite channels serves as a means of enjoyment and entertainment, enriching their general knowledge and shaping their personalities.

Considering television as a primary medium for spending leisure time suggests that it has a significant impact on families and young people in particular. The variety of programmes available not only reinforces values and shapes attitudes, but also facilitates joint discussions and brings about significant changes in relationships between family members. Television can increase opportunities for interaction and communication within the home.

Through the magic of broadcasting, television has strengthened cultural links with other regions. Our respondents showed a keen interest in diverse programming, with sports being the top choice, followed closely by action, adventure and crime films. Meanwhile, young women are often attracted to social dramas, particularly Egyptian, Syrian, Turkish and Indian films.

In addition, some young people express a love of reading newspapers and magazines, reflecting their cultural level, which serves as a determining factor in their choice of leisure activities. Reading is an important way for them to spend their free time, with interests spanning different publications and genres.

Daily newspapers cover a variety of topics, issues and articles that cater to the cultural needs and desires of young people. Many young people enjoy sections dedicated to sports

¹⁶- Les Cahiers CREAD: Youth and Society, n° 26, 2nd quarter, 1991.

news, crossword puzzles and humorous cartoons, which often convey sarcasm and criticism of the current situation. Young women, in particular, are attracted to entertainment news and horoscopes.

The third category of activities relates to traditional roles associated with women. Young women who do not work outside the home focus on domestic tasks, seeing the home as a training ground for their future role as homemakers. They take pride in managing household affairs, which gives them a sense of achievement and satisfaction. As one respondent noted, “When we work at home, we feel that we’ve created something important”.

These activities also serve as opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills, often leading to recognition and admiration from family and neighbours.

Sewing, for example, is an important pastime for women, not only as a way of spending leisure time, but also as a valuable skill that can serve as a source of income to cover essential expenses. In addition, visiting relatives allows young women to engage with their social environment and facilitates links with the outside world, especially in terms of regional customs and local community characteristics.

Visiting relatives serves as an outlet and a way to escape the constraints of the home, which can sometimes feel like a prison. Many young women seek to liberate themselves through family connections or by visiting gravesites to temporarily escape the pressures and burdens placed on them. This sentiment is reflected in the words of one respondent who said: “When we go out and visit, we feel free”.

Returning to the theme of leisure activities, listening to music emerges as a popular pastime among young people. Music has a significant impact on individual behaviour, shaping a complex range of feelings and emotions. It influences opinions and attitudes and often has a positive effect on mental well-being. Music can transport listeners to a realm of joy and euphoria, to a world of romance and enchanting dreams. As one respondent put it: “I love listening to music because it takes away my fear”. Music acts as a profound language that resonates with the human spirit, enriching emotions and allowing individuals to transcend material concerns towards spiritual contemplation.

In addition, some respondents expressed a preference for engaging in activities that facilitate their active participation in society. They mentioned involvement in associations focused on scientific, social, cultural and sporting initiatives, as well as their individual hobbies. This involvement not only enriches their leisure time, but also fosters a sense of community and belonging, thereby improving their overall quality of life.

The way these young people spend their leisure time reflects their strong desire to be entertained in places that provide the necessary comfort. Researchers have identified three conditions for real enjoyment of leisure activities:

1. It should allow individuals to relieve physical fatigue and psychological stress, which negatively affect their mental well-being.
2. It should provide opportunities for renewal and replenishment of energy.
3. It should relieve individuals from the daily boredom that results from the repetition of life.

Leisure that does not meet these broad criteria is considered inadequate to meet the needs of individuals in today’s society¹⁷.

¹⁷- Written by Souad Fiyash, Lobna Al-Najjar, Awatif Al-Qutiti: Family and Entertainment, Al-Karidif Magazine, No. 10, Orbis Printing, August 1996, p. 16.

Conclusion

The most significant finding of this field study is that most of the young people in the area have perceptions and representations that fall within a unified view of leisure time as a waste - a meaningless and aimless passage of time. This perspective is evident in our analytical reading of the respondents' narratives in which they confirmed their lack of investment in their leisure time, using it only to fill the void.

This approach to leisure among Sabra's youth reflects their pessimistic and unproductive view of free time and highlights the contradiction between their perceptions and actual practices. Based on the results of this study, we can objectively conclude that as the amount of free time increases among unemployed youth, so does their anxiety about how to use it. This finding serves as a fundamental observation, indicating that leisure time encompasses not only the idea of time itself, but also the quality and functions of the activities undertaken during this time.

The experience of managing leisure time is closely linked to the social structure of society, as well as to cultural levels and technological progress. The lack of effective use of leisure time, which affects Algerian youth in general and the youth of Sabra in particular, can be attributed firstly to the inadequacy of the state's role in achieving social integration and its contribution to the provision of recreational facilities and parks. In addition, there is a lack of a clear and effective strategy for investing this time in a way that benefits both the individual and the community, which could lead to an uncertain future for unemployed youth who are vulnerable:

- Certain political groups and movements that address their identity issues, provide a sense of security and fill their void through guidance and recruitment.
- Parallel and informal economic networks ("turbanistes").
- All forms of crime and various forms of deviance.

In the light of this study, we can say that leisure is a social concept that refers to the diverse desires and interests of individuals during periods of their daily lives when they have the right to use their time in a way that satisfies their personal needs and achieves their specific goals.

Thus, leisure can be a double-edged sword for unemployed youth: it can be a blessing if used wisely and rationally, or it can become a curse if not used effectively or invested in ways that bring benefits.

However, based on all the above, another question may arise: if the real conditions and favourable circumstances are provided for the unemployed youth in the region, will this necessarily lead to changes in their perception of leisure time and how to use it?

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