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Culture of leisure practices among student youth in the post-pandemic period in the Astana IT University

Zhanar Abildinova^a✉, Erkin Aubakirov^b, Zhazira Baisarina^a

^aAstana IT University, Astana, Kazakhstan

^bL.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

✉ abildinovy9@gmail.com

Abstract. This article is dedicated to analyze changes in the culture of leisure practices among student youth in the post-pandemic period. Under the global COVID-19 pandemic, student life underwent significant transformations, which influenced leisure forms, communication methods, and social interactions. The article examines the main trends that have formed in the leisure sector after the end of quarantine restrictions, as well as the factors contributing to their emergence. Special attention is given to the impact of digital technologies, hybrid communication forms, and changes in priorities among students regarding entertainment, sports, and cultural events. The author explores the effects of social isolation and distance learning on the daily practices of youth, focusing on their desire to restore social connections and find new forms of cultural activity. Based on the conducted research, key features of post-pandemic leisure are identified, and recommendations for improving students' quality of life in a changing social context are provided.

Keywords: leisure practices; student youth; post-pandemic period; digitalization; social isolation; cultural events; hybrid communication forms

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Постпандемия кезеңіндегі Astana IT Университетінің студент-жастары арасындағы демалыс практикаларының мәдениеті

Жанар Абильдинова^а, Еркін Аубакиров^б, Жазира Байсарина^а

^а*Astana IT University, Астана, Қазақстан*

^б*Н.Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан*

Культура досуговых практик среди студенческой молодежи в постпандемический период в Astana IT University

Жанар Абильдинова^а, Еркін Аубакиров^б, Жазира Байсарина^а

^а*Astana IT University, Астана, Казахстан*

^б*Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан*

Аңдатпа. Мақала постпандемия кезеңіндегі студент-жастардың бос уақытын өткізу мәдениетіндегі өзгерістерді талдауға арналған. Жаһандық COVID-19 пандемиясы жағдайында студенттік өмір демалысты өткізуге, қарым-қатынас әдістеріне және әлеуметтік өзара әрекеттесуге әсер еткен елеулі өзгерістерге ұшырады. Жұмыста карантиндік шектеулер аяқталғаннан бері демалыс секторында пайда болған негізгі тенденциялар, сондай-ақ олардың пайда болуына ықпал ететін факторлар қарастырылған. Цифрлық технологиялардың ықпалына, коммуникацияның гибриді формаларына және студенттер арасындағы ойын-сауық, спорт және мәдени іс-шараларға қатысты басымдықтардың өзгеруіне ерекше назар аударылады. Авторлар әлеуметтік оқшауландудың және қашықтан білім берудің жастардың күнделікті тәжірибесіне әсерін зерттеп, олардың әлеуметтік байланыстарды қалпына келтіруге және мәдени практикалардың жаңа түрлерін іздеуге деген ұмтылысына назар аударады. Жүргізілген зерттеулер негізінде пандемиядан кейінгі бос уақыттың негізгі ерекшеліктері анықталып, өзгермелі әлеуметтік контексте студенттердің өмір сүру сапасын жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстар жасалды. **Түйін сөздер:** демалыс практикалары; студент-жастар; постпандемия кезеңі; цифрландыру; әлеуметтік оқшаулау; демалыс мәдениеті; коммуникацияның гибриді түрлері

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу изменений в культуре досуговых практик среди студенческой молодежи в постпандемический период. В условиях глобальной пандемии COVID-19 студенческая жизнь претерпела значительные трансформации, что оказало влияние на формы досуга, способы коммуникации и общественные взаимодействия. В работе рассматриваются основные тенденции, которые сформировались в сфере досуга после завершения карантинных ограничений, а также факторы, способствующие их возникновению. Особое внимание уделено влиянию цифровых технологий, гибридных форм общения и изменению приоритетов среди студентов в отношении развлечений, спорта и культурных мероприятий. Авторы исследуют влияние социальной изоляции и дистанционного образования на повседневные досуговые практики среди молодежи, акцентируя внимание на их стремлении к восстановлению социальных связей и поиску новых форм культурной активности. На основе проведенного исследования выявляются ключевые особенности постпандемического досуга, а также предлагаются рекомендации для улучшения качества жизни студентов в условиях изменяющегося социального контекста.

Ключевые слова: досуговые практики; студенческая молодежь; постпандемический период; цифровизация; социальная изоляция; досуговая культура; гибридные формы общения

Introduction

The topic of leisure in cultural studies has been touched upon many times, but within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue still requires consideration.

Theoretical analysis of major empirical studies documenting fundamental changes in lifestyle and leisure formed the basis of the concept of J. Dumazedier, which he called "leisure civilization" (Dumazedier, 1993). According to J. Dumazedier, the origin of this civilization dates back to the 1960s-1970s.

To analyze trends in the transformation of leisure culture practices, it is important to take into account both past experience and global experience, which will allow us to understand how leisure culture is being transformed.

M. Bakhtin, analyzing in detail the culture of leisure in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, calls it "Culture of Laughter" in his work and identifies three of its main forms: the first consists of ritual and spectacular forms (carnival-type celebrations, various public laughing performances, etc.); the second - verbal funny (including parody) works of various kinds: oral and written, in Latin and folk languages; the third is various forms and genres of familiar street speech (curses, national emblems, etc.) (Bakhtin, 1965).

All three types of forms, reflecting - with all their heterogeneity - a single laughter side of the world, according to M. Bakhtin, are closely related to each other and are largely intertwined with each other.

M. Bakhtin deliberately examines leisure culture in isolation from its other forms, emphasizing its significance and at the same time the fact that this topic was poorly studied at the time of writing his work.

According to other leisure researchers, such as A. Vozmitel and G. Osadchaya, lifestyle is stable forms of social existence and social interaction of individuals, characteristic of certain social relations and formed under the influence of norms common to a certain group people and the values that reflect their relationships (Vozmitel & Osadchaya, 2009).

Lifestyle is expressed through that part of people's behavior patterns, norms, and values that identifies an individual as part of a certain group and at the same time distinguishes this group from other social groups. By this definition, researchers usually understand a wide variety of everyday practices of individuals (Roshina, 2007).

If we try to classify leisure practices differently, we run the risk of getting lost in a diversity of leisure cultures to a degree almost as great as the number of people on Earth and the number of different leisure habits they have. Leisure practices can also be endlessly divided into types and subtypes. Therefore, the line between various leisure culture practices can be drawn by delimiting the functions they perform. J. Dumazedier and Yu. Streltsov propose three main functions of leisure: an entertainment function, a developmental function, and a recreational function. These functions are important in the formation of basic knowledge about leisure (Dumazedier, 1993; Streltsov, 2003).

The pandemic and its impact on transformations of the leisure practices of student youth is the main novelty of this study.

Online leisure has undoubtedly become an outlet for many Kazakhstanis during the quarantine period, including young people. As for the post-pandemic world and online leisure in it, the

online format in the post-pandemic period is only developing and diversifying in every possible way. The practice of lockdowns and the pandemic culture that emerged as a result of the spread of the global pandemic will leave its mark for the foreseeable future. This gives grounds to put forward the thesis that the pandemic has contributed to a certain social distancing in society in general, and among young people in particular, the development of individualistic values, as well as even greater digitalization of youth leisure practices.

According to a study conducted in April and May 2020 by the UN Human Rights Office together with the International Labor Organization and other partners (nearly 12,000 responses were received from young people aged 18-29, representing 112 countries), implications for the implementation of holiday rights were the most prominent. 68% of respondents noted "significant restrictions" on leisure activities, including meeting with friends, playing sports, and cultural interests (From UN reports, 2020).

The leisure culture of student youth in Kazakhstan is an important indicator of socio-cultural changes and adaptation of young people to modern challenges. Different researches show that student leisure in Kazakhstan is diverse and multi-layered, including both traditional forms (sports events, cultural clubs) and new forms, such as volunteer activities and participation in social projects. For example, the work of Rymkhanova and co-authors (2021) emphasizes that volunteer activities contribute to the formation of personal and professional qualities in students, and also serves as a tool for social adaptation and integration into society. An important aspect is the influence of the socio-cultural environment of the university on the organization of leisure activities. Shcherbakova & Shcherbakova (2020) note that students' leisure activities are not only a way of organizing free time, but also a means of forming value orientations, personal development, and integration into public space. Thus, students' leisure practices in Kazakhstan are becoming an important element of their social identification and cultural adaptation in the context of globalization and cultural diversity.

Modern-day researchers are dedicated to the technological aspects of organizing youth leisure. Garkusha (2021) in his textbook examines issues related to the technologies of organizing youth leisure, including the classification of the technologies and forms of organizing youth leisure, as well as the specifics of innovative technologies in this area. In addition, Myrzabekova (2017) in her article analyzes the results of a study conducted among students of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, identifying the main features of leisure practices of modern student youth. The data obtained allow us to better understand the types of leisure, the social environment of leisure practices, and the time and place of spending free time among students, which contributes to a more effective organization of leisure activities in universities.

Materials and methods

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, which allowed us to obtain a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the subject of the study. The main empirical tool was a questionnaire survey method implemented using the Google Forms online platform. This made it possible to cover a wide sample and ensure ease of participation for respondents. In addition, a comparative analysis method was used to process and interpret

the collected data, which made it possible to identify differences and similarities in students' responses according to various criteria and categories provided for in the research hypothesis. The use of mixed methods is due to the desire to increase scientific objectivity and ensure a multidimensional analysis of the phenomenon under study.

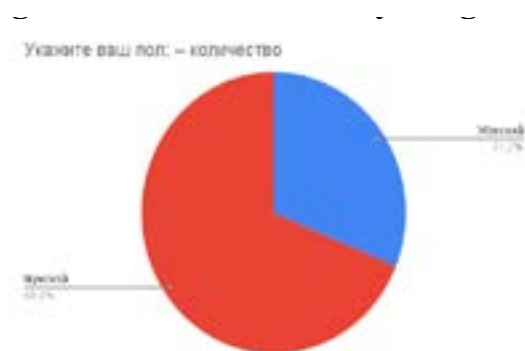
A total of 362 students of Astana International University (AITU) took part in the survey. The survey was conducted anonymously in May 2023, which made it possible to minimize socially desirable answers and increase the reliability of the data. The questionnaire included questions covering a wide range of topics related to leisure practices, motivation, preferences, and conditions for organizing students' free time. The analysis of questionnaire data was carried out based on previously developed criteria corresponding to the methodological foundations of the study and the requirements of scientific reliability.

The link to the form with the survey results is available at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1fzMTj5A5VsGrWxJ4pGBNA3lHZfMZtdcInr1WsvuZt-I/edit#responses>. All diagrams and illustrations included in the study are presented in Russian, since this is the language in which the survey itself was conducted. At the same time, each image is provided with an explanation in English, which facilitates the perception of information by English-speaking readers and contributes to international scientific communication.

Results and Discussion

249 boys (68.8% of the total number of respondents) and 113 girls (31.2% of the total number of respondents, see Figure 1) took part in the survey.

Figure 1. Please indicate your gender



The next question was about the age of the respondents. According to the survey results, 95.9% of respondents were in the age category of 18-44 years at the time of the survey, the remaining categories were 4.1%. Age categories were taken according to the age categories developed by WHO (Figure 2):

Young age - 18-44

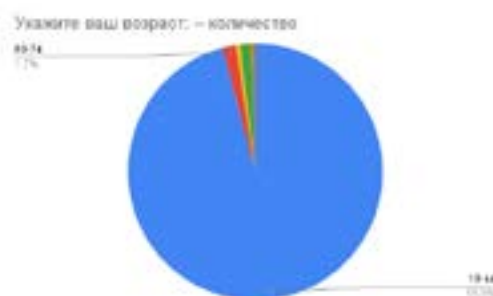
Average age - 45-59

Elderly age - 60-74

Old age - 75-90

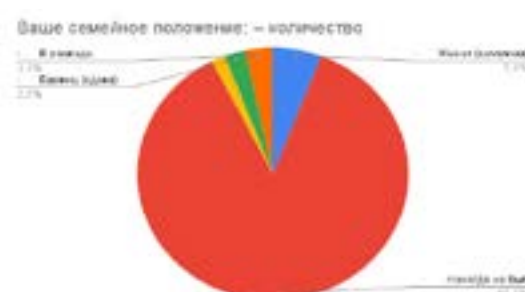
Longevity - 90+.

Figure 2. Please indicate your age



The next question allowed us to determine the marital status of the respondents (Figure 3).

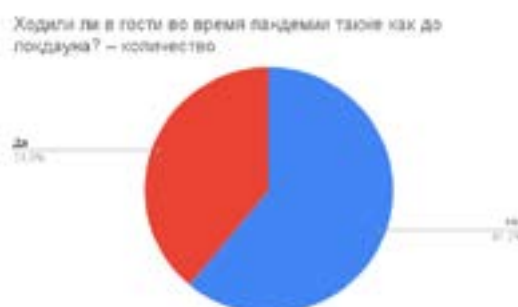
Figure 3. Your marital status?



According to the results, 86.7% of respondents had never been married, 5.8% were married, 3.3% were divorced, and 2.5% were widows.

The next question was: “Did you visit people during the pandemic as you did before the lockdown?” (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Did you visit people during the pandemic as you did before the lockdown?



39.2% of respondents reported that they continued to visit guests during the pandemic as much as before the lockdown. 60.8% of respondents responded that they did not visit guests during the pandemic as much as before the lockdown. The majority of respondents, according to the survey results, did not visit guests as actively as before the lockdown, which is quite expected given the restrictions and social isolation introduced due to the pandemic. Only a minority was able to maintain the same activity in visiting guests.

Analysis of the “Yes” answer (39.2%):

Maintaining social activity: Although the pandemic has restricted many activities, 39.2% of respondents still continued to visit others as much as before the lockdown. This may indicate a higher level of social activity among this group, perhaps consisting of people who chose not to change their habits during the pandemic.

Impact on personal connections: People who continued to visit others may have felt the need to maintain personal connections despite the restrictions. This may also indicate a lack of awareness of possible risks or ignorance of social restrictions.

Analysis of the “No” answer (60.8%):

Changing habits: Almost 61% of respondents reported that they did not continue to visit others during the pandemic as much as before the lockdown. This clearly indicates that most people adhered to the restrictions, perhaps due to fear of infection or responsibility for the health of others.

Impact on psycho-emotional state: Respondents who stopped visiting friends and relatives may have felt lonely or isolated, which may be related to the emotional state under restrictions.

Change in social practices: This may also indicate a more sustainable adaptation to online communication formats and changes in social practices. During the pandemic, many people switched to virtual meetings and communication via the Internet.

Psychological aspect: The fact that 39.2% of respondents continued communication in an offline format may also be due to psychological factors. For these people, face-to-face meetings may be important in terms of psycho-emotional well-being.

Potential recommendations:

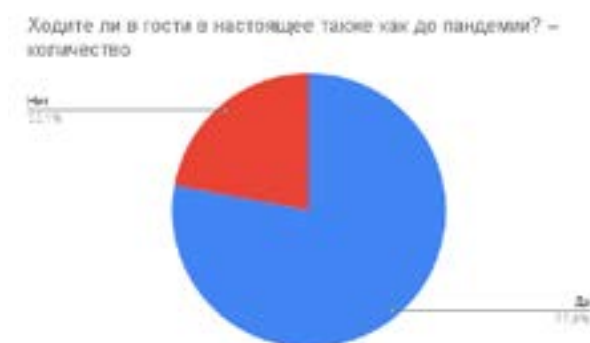
For future research, it is possible to further investigate which factors (age, place of residence, health status, etc.) most strongly influenced the decision to continue or stop visiting guests during the pandemic.

For social initiatives: Given that a significant number of people have stopped social contacts, it may be advisable to develop programs aimed at helping overcome social isolation, especially among older people or those who have been more stressed by the pandemic.

Psycho-emotional support: It may be useful to offer people ways to remain socially active in a safe environment, such as through online communities or events.

The next question was about visiting guests at the current time (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Do you visit people now as much as before the pandemic?



66.4% of respondents say they visit people now as often as they did before the pandemic. 33.6% of respondents said their habits have changed in the post-pandemic period and they do not visit people as often as they did before the pandemic.

Interpretation of the results:

Maintaining habits (66.4%):

Despite the pandemic, most respondents returned to their previous social habits. This may indicate that after the lifting of the main restrictions, people restored their previous activity, feeling safe.

Some could continue to communicate in the usual format, since the pandemic did not become a significant obstacle to social activity for them.

Changes in habits (33.6%):

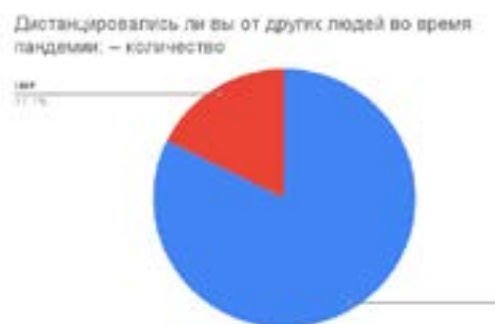
Almost a third of respondents say their habits have changed and they do not visit people as often as they did before. This may indicate several factors:

- Changing perceptions of social activity in the face of possible health risks.
- Personal fatigue with social gatherings or a change in attitude towards personal safety in the post-pandemic situation.
- A shift to more limited and more conscious communication, possibly through virtual channels.
- This may also indicate that people have become more cautious or have found other ways to maintain contact with loved ones after the pandemic.

Overall, the majority of respondents (66.4%) returned to their previous social habits, visiting guests as they did before the pandemic, which may indicate a restoration of social communication. However, a significant proportion of people (33.6%) changed their habits regarding visiting guests, which may indicate both new habits and possible caution or a change in the perception of social gatherings in the post-pandemic period.

The next question is about social distancing during a pandemic, which shows the extent to which young people comply with the rules dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Have you distanced yourself from other people during the pandemic?



According to the results of the study, the majority of respondents (82.3%) maintained social distance during the pandemic, while 17.7% did not distance themselves. At the same time, the majority of respondents (74%) answered that they are not currently distancing themselves from other people (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Are you distancing yourself from other people now?

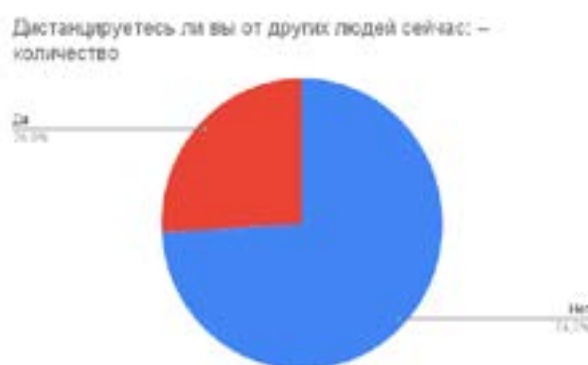
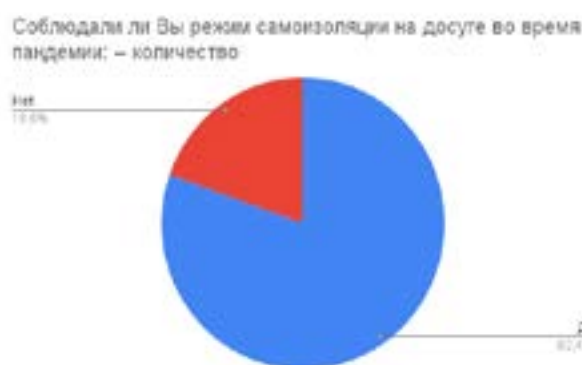


Figure 8 shows us how young people comply with the self-isolation regime during the pandemic, precisely during leisure time. It turned out that 80.4% of the students surveyed observed self-isolation during their leisure time during the pandemic. 19.6% - did not comply. Approximately every 5th student treated the self-isolation regime with disdain during leisure time during the pandemic, putting habitual communication during leisure time higher than the risk of getting infected. This is quite an interesting fact to consider. And, although the majority put their health at the forefront, there were still those who valued their usual leisure time more highly.

Figure 8. Did you observe the self-isolation regime during your leisure time during the pandemic?



Figures 9, 10, and 11 show us statistics on the popularity of various leisure practices among students before, during, and after the pandemic. The following answer options containing various leisure practices were proposed:

- A. Watch TV
- B. Listen to music, radio
- C. Shopping
- D. Visit and receive guests at home
- E. Engage in clubs
- F. Chat with friends

- G. Visit exhibitions, museums
- H. Play sports
- I. Communicate using a computer or smartphone
- J. Pursue your “hobby”
- K. Read
- L. Walk, travel, go out of town, relax in the country
- M. Take care of the garden, the vegetable garden, local area
- N. Go to the cinema, theaters, and concert halls
- O. Spending time with family
- P. Participate in the work of public councils, associations, and parties

Figure 9. Popularity of leisure practices before the pandemic



Figure 10. Popularity of leisure practices during the pandemic.

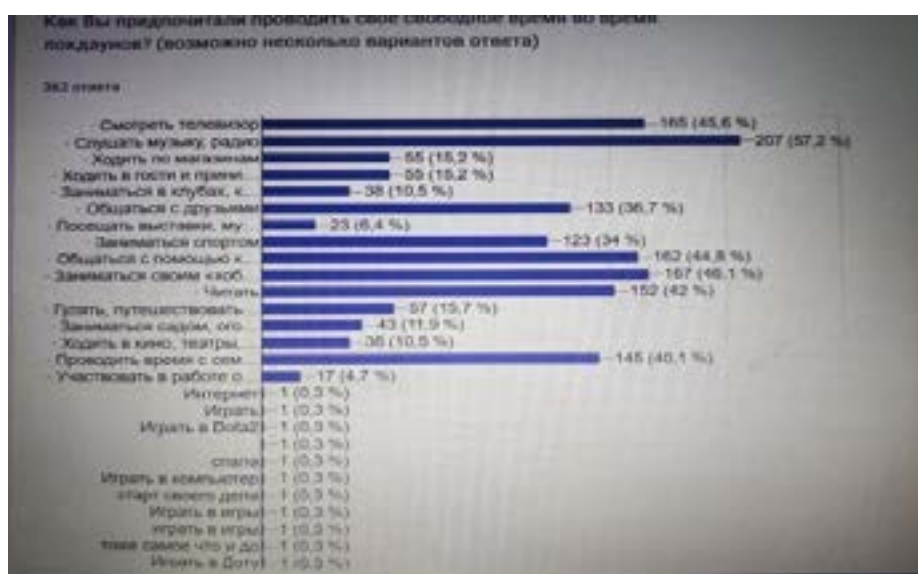
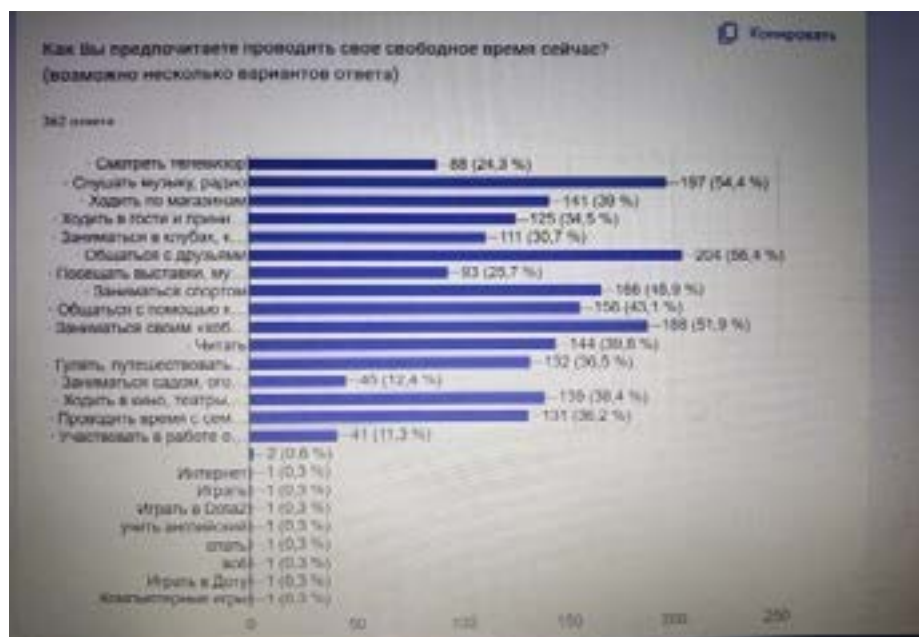


Figure 11. The popularity of leisure practices at present.

The most popular leisure practices in the pre-pandemic period among students were listening to music, radio, chatting with friends, communicating using a computer, smartphone, and pursuing their “hobbies.” The least popular practices were: visiting exhibitions and museums, gardening, and participating in the work of associations and parties. Students were also given the opportunity to add their own practices. Mostly, it turned out to be various computer and Internet games, as well as training.

During the pandemic, the situation changed and the popularity of practices that involve social communication decreased: visiting and receiving guests, communicating with friends, is no longer so relevant. However, with the advent of the post-pandemic period, these leisure practices are again gaining momentum among young people. At the same time, before, during, and after the pandemic, Internet gaming practices do not lose their positions.

Figure 12 shows that during the pandemic, the majority (more than half – 57.7%) of respondents experienced a lack of face-to-face communication.

Comparative analysis of students' leisure practices

Pre-pandemic period.

Before the pandemic, students actively used their free time to communicate with friends, attend cultural events, and pursue hobbies. However, activities such as visiting museums and participating in associations remained less popular. This is confirmed by Ozanov's study (2017), which ranks leisure activities by popularity among students.

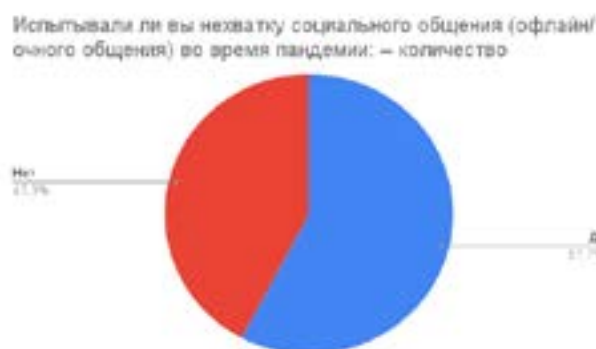
Pandemic period.

During the pandemic, there has been a significant reduction in physical activity and a deterioration in the financial situation of students. The transition to online learning has also led to disruptions in the educational process. A decrease in interest in personal communication and an increase in involvement in studies, despite an increase in anxiety, are also noted in the studies of Oleshkevich and Dmitrieva (2021).

Post-pandemic period.

After the lifting of restrictions, there has been a restoration of interest in social interactions and cultural events. However, digital forms of leisure, such as online games and the use of gadgets, remain popular, as confirmed by the study by Saktapov (2023).

Figure 12. Have you experienced a lack of social communication (offline/face-to-face) during the pandemic?



To analyze the data provided, we need to consider two main aspects: to what extent respondents experienced a lack of social communication during the pandemic and how this lack manifested itself among the group as a whole.

1. Frequency of occurrence of lack of communication

Constant interaction with others is an important element of social life. Considering that the question concerned a lack of offline communication, the following can be highlighted:

Yes: In 57.7% of cases, respondents answered that they experienced a lack of communication during the pandemic.

No: In 42.3% of cases, respondents did not experience a lack of communication.

Thus, the majority of people who took part in the survey experienced a lack of face-to-face communication during the pandemic. This may indicate that the restrictions associated with social distancing had a strong impact on people's emotional state and social connections.

2. Reasons for Lack of Communication

It can be expected that those respondents who noted a lack of communication were worried about travel restrictions, the inability to meet with friends and family in their usual environment. Based on sociological research, such restrictions can increase feelings of loneliness and isolation (Cacioppo et al., 2008). This leads to stress, depression, and general dissatisfaction with the quality of life (Kawachi et al., 2001).

3. Comparison with other studies

Other studies conducted during the pandemic confirm that social distancing and isolation had a significant impact on mental health. For example, a study conducted in China found that most people felt stressed and anxious due to restrictions in communication (Qiu et al., 2020). Overall, it can be said that restrictions on face-to-face real-time meetings played an important role in the deterioration of psycho-emotional state, especially among people who tend to be socially

active. In addition, data from a US study show that those who lack offline communication are more likely to report feelings of loneliness and isolation (Primack et al., 2020). This confirms that offline communication has been essential for maintaining normal psychological well-being during the pandemic.

The majority of respondents report a lack of face-to-face communication during the pandemic, confirming the importance of social contacts for most people.

Isolation and social distancing can have a negative impact on psycho-emotional health, increasing feelings of loneliness and stress, as shown in numerous studies.

This study highlights the importance of restoring normal social connections in the post-pandemic period and draws attention to the need for further efforts to support mental health and social interaction in the new reality.

Conclusion

The trend of a sharp transformation of leisure culture practices in the pandemic period is rather a pattern that arose as a result of the onset of a complex and unusual way of life for society and each individual in conditions of self-isolation, and is not something unpredictable or unforeseen. Therefore, an attempt to study and observe changes in certain spheres of social life with the onset of the post-pandemic period seems to be an extremely important and timely matter that meets the needs of public consciousness today. Obviously, understanding that the culture of leisure is a priori transformed along with the emergence of new norms of social behavior, we can analyze the prerequisites for this process. If the reason is the onset of a new post-pandemic period, and the result is the transformation of leisure culture practices, then the prerequisite, undoubtedly, is the transformation of the consciousness of society. That is, first the consciousness of society is transformed, and then the culture of leisure is transformed.

The development of forms of leisure culture in Kazakhstan has its own specifics:

Pre-pandemic period:

- Most popular activities: listening to music, radio, socializing (in person and via gadgets), hobbies.

- Least popular: cultural events (museums, exhibitions), gardening, participation in associations and parties.

- Additional activities: computer/internet games and learning.

Pandemic period:

- Decrease in popularity of practices involving face-to-face communication.

- Increase or maintenance of interest in online activities.

Post-pandemic period:

- Return of interest in social interactions.

- Stability of online games: they remain popular at all stages.

The social restrictions of the pandemic have increased the digitalization of leisure.

Game and digital practices (in particular, online games) have shown resilience to external factors, indicating a deep integration of these forms of leisure into the daily lives of students.

The return to face-to-face communication in the post-pandemic period suggests that the need for social interaction remains fundamental, despite digitalization.

Youth leisure is subject to the influence of external factors (for example, a pandemic), but retains the core of stable practices.

Digital leisure formats do not displace face-to-face communication, but rather complement it.

Technological habits (gadgets, online games) have become an integral part of leisure and learning. An undeniable and powerful lever for transforming the consciousness of society has become the active and constant, tireless influence of the media and the Internet, social networks and other sources of information.

Kazakhstan is moving in this direction, and it is logical to assume that in the post-pandemic period, the popularity of online leisure practices in Kazakhstan will grow steadily due to the rise of the “gig economy” and changes in work methods, increased technicization and automation, etc. However, offline leisure in the post-pandemic period is also likely to gain new strength, transforming into other forms or giving rise to completely new practices. Since the beginning of the pandemic, humanity has experienced enormous stress, both psychological and social. The inability to satisfy the natural cultural, psycho-emotional, social needs of a person and receive quality services in the field of offline leisure, as well as spending too much time online in isolation, has formed a kind of additional energy clot of physical and emotional content.

If we consider the issue of leisure from this point of view, it becomes clear how important the place of leisure is today in the “civilization of leisure”, which was discussed by the leisure theorist J. Dumazedier (1993).

The distance that gradually forms between people is palpable and the hypothesis put forward in the introduction can thus be indirectly confirmed by the results of this study.

The practical significance of this work can be the results of the study and foreign experience: the importance of organizing and filling leisure time for young people is as important within the framework of student-centered learning as the educational process itself. It is important to take into account foreign experience in an attempt to organize quality leisure time for students within the framework of student-centered education and create all the necessary conditions for this.

With the advent of the post-pandemic era, the trend of changes in leisure practices is inevitable, and the topic of this work, in light of the transformations taking place in society, acquires unprecedented relevance and requires further research in this direction.

Authors' contribution to the article

Abildinova Zh.S. – development of the article idea, conceptualization and selection of methodology, selection of literature, translation of foreign sources, collection and processing of empirical data, writing the article text, design and correction, as well as active participation in the discussion and interpretation of the results.

Aubakirov Ye.N. - consultation in constructing the theoretical and methodological basis of the work, recommendations in selecting a bibliography on the topic of the article, assistance in choosing a journal for publication, recommendations on editing the final version of the article text, participation in the discussion, interpretation, and generalization of the results.

Baissarina Zh.S. – determined the direction for the development and progression of the article, provided a survey for the collection of empirical data, ensured that the final version of the article adhered to academic standards and requirements.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no relevant conflict of interests.

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Авторлар туралы мәлімет / Information about authors / Сведения об авторах

Абильдинова Жанар Суюмбаевна – оқытушы, Astana IT University, PhD докторант, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтбаев к-сі, 2, 010008, Астана, Қазақстан, abildinovy9@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5770-2930>

Abildinova Zhanar Suyumbayevna – teacher, Astana IT University, Mangilik El Ave., 55/11, PhD student, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satbayev St., 2, 010008, Astana, Kazakhstan, abildinovy9@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5770-2930>

Абильдинова Жанар Суюмбаевна – преподаватель, Astana IT University, проспект Мангилик Ел, 55/11, PhD докторант, Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 010008, Астана, Казахстан, abildinovy9@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5770-2930>

Аубакиров Еркін Нысанбекович – философия ғылымдарының кандидаты, доцент, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтбаев к-сі, 2, 010008, Астана, Қазақстан, prepod-2014@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3538-5302>

Aubakirov Yerkin Nyssanbekovich – associate professor, candidate of philosophical sciences, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev St., 2, 010008, Astana, Kazakhstan, prepod-2014@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3538-5302>

Аубакиров Еркін Нысанбекович – кандидат философских наук, доцент, Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 010008, Астана, Казахстан, prepod-2014@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3538-5302>

Байсарина Жазира Сламкуловна – PhD, ассистент профессор, Astana IT University, Мәңгілік Ел даңғ., 55/11, 010000, Астана, Қазақстан, zhazira_82@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5838-2190>

Baisarina Zhazira Slamkulovna – PhD, Assistant Professor, Astana IT University, Mangilik El Ave., 55/11, 010000, Astana, Kazakhstan, zhazira_82@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5838-2190>

Байсарина Жазира Сламкуловна – PhD, ассистент профессор, Astana IT University, пр. Мәңгілік Ел, 55/11, 010000, Астана, Казахстан, zhazira_82@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5838-2190>

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