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FREE TIME AND ITS USE DEPENDING ON THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS – SELECTED RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH ON THE STUDENTS' FREE TIME

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze the daily free time budget of students, their free time structure and to show the possible differences in free time management depending on the respondents' professional status. The primary method of collecting research material was a diagnostic survey, including the questionnaire developed by the author. The research was conducted twice, in 2018 and 2020, each time at two academic centres in Poland. The research results show that students are a very diverse social group in terms of activities undertaken in their free time, and the visible differences in how it is spent are linked to the income source of the respondents.

Keywords: free time, forms of leisure time use, students, own research.

1. Introduction

From the economic point of view, total time is the main non-renewable resource for people, and considering contemporary cultural surroundings one may say that it is also a deficit commodity (Klein, 2009, p. 4; Nowak, 2010) which should be

properly managed. This is one of the reasons for conducting research on population's time budgets but the purpose is also to describe lifestyles and ways in which people organize their daily lives and manage time allocated to specific activities. Budget surveys also allow for assessing the standard of living of the population and its diversity. The quantity and quality of free time is important to the general well-being of people and their families, and may bring additional physical and psychological benefits (Warren, 2015; OECD, 2019). The increase in the amount of free time over the last century is well documented. However, much less is known about the quality of the use of free time (Haller, Hadler, and Kaup, 2013).

The amount of time spent on work and other activities, and the way it is used depends on various individual and social factors, among them the very important ones include the professional status of an individual and the related level of individual income (Dąbrowska, Gutkowska, Janoś-Kresło, and Ozimek, 2010; Kwilecki, 2011, p. 11; Pisarska, 2015). According to studies carried out for 24 OECD countries, along with income growth (measured by GDP *per capita*), the number of hours of free time during the week is growing (Veal, 2016). Free time can be expressed in economic terms, as it requires strong material support (Truszkowska-Wojtkowiak, 2012, p. 9). Its management, which determines the quality of free time, is associated with various expenses determining leisure time patterns, social status, lifestyle and individual wellbeing (Jarosz 2016; Mokras-Grabowska, 2015; Niemczyk and Handzel, 2016; Piekut 2013).

In contemporary scientific research in various disciplines, real-time resources and their management are treated as the basic indicator of the quality of life not only in the individual but also in the social dimension (Czaja, 2011; Dąbrowska et al., 2010; Puciato, 2009; Truszkowska-Wojtkowiak, 2012, pp. 6-7). Both working time and time off work bring benefits. Individual, social, and economic successes, development and prosperity depend on the distribution of real time into working time and time for other activities, as well as the ways of their diverse use. The amount of time which an individual spends at work, and thus also outside it, is also an important aspect of the work-life balance (Warren, 2015).

The subject of the research presented in this article is time budget management, in particular free time, of a selected group of people – full-time students. This concerns a specific group of young people which appeared along with the popularization of higher education, and whose specificity shapes the future nature of society (Chorab, 2016). At the same time, it is also a very diverse social group whose main goal is to fulfill the obligations arising from being a student (Chorab, 2016; Zaniewska, 2012). Research shows, however, that an increasing proportion of full-time students take up gainful employment, and a characteristic feature of this social group is the lack of time resulting from undertaking many different social roles (Chorab, 2016; Lenart, 2014). The belief that work during the studies, apart from financial aspect, significantly facilitates employment after graduation is becoming increasingly common (Kołodziej, 2016, p. 53). Therefore, more frequently students spend time

on gainful work, cutting down their time spent on study, but also limiting their free time. This reduction also results from the opportunities created for students by social and demographic conditions (a decrease in the number of students associated with the demographic decline), as well as regulatory (Bologna process introducing three levels of studies together with the statutory limitation of the number of hours in the study program) and technological (facilitating knowledge acquisition and enabling to exercise various activities at the same time, the so-called “time multiplication” or “time deepening”) factors (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2011, p. 206; Jung, 2011, p. 155; White, 2018).

The objective of the study was to analyse a daily time budget and forms of spending free time by the surveyed students, and to show its diversity of use depending on the professional status of the respondents and the moment when the research was conducted. The study was divided into three parts. In the first one, the survey of the literature on the subject was carried out, allowing the presentation of theoretical considerations about free time and its management, While the second describes the research methodology and the groups of respondents. The third part is devoted to the analysis of selected results of the surveys. Achieving the goal of the study allowed to answer the research questions:

- Does the professional status of the surveyed students (sources of their income) determine the forms of spending free time by this group of people?
- Did the free time activities of the respondents change over the two years between the conducted surveys?

The primary method of collecting research material was a diagnostic survey in which the author’s questionnaire was used. The study was conducted twice, in February 2018 and 2020, on a research sample consisting of 468 respondents who were full-time, first-cycle of study students.

2. Theoretical considerations on the essence of free time

While working time is well defined and scrutinized in the source literature, giving a definition of free time can be difficult. This is mainly because of the fact that nowadays free time is dealt with by experts representing various scientific disciplines, including sociology, psychology, physical culture, pedagogy, medicine and economics. This results in numerous definitions of free time, which draws attention to certain specific aspects important from the point of view of a given area of science, but also the objective of this study. The complexity of the issue of free time and its ambiguity in terms of definition can be demonstrated by the fact that in English-language literature, three terms are used to describe free time: *free time*, *leisure time* and *leisure*. *Free time* means the time at the disposal of an individual at his/her discretion (it is free from biological and economic constraints). *Leisure time* is the amount of free time which is intended for the realization of free time values (in Poland referred to as leisure, vacation). While the term *leisure* is reserved for the

determination of self-fulfillment and self-enrichment achieved by an individual as the result of using free time for an activity of one's choice, which provides relaxation, the main function of free time (Kwilecki, 2011, p. 8).

According to Cordes (2013, p. 3), despite difficulties in defining free time, science continues attempts that can be classified into one of three forms. The first one consists in an examination of the origin of the word as a way to reveal its basic meaning. The second is to explore the individual's experience while involving in activities referred to as leisure. The third approach is to assess people's motivation to engage in such experiences.

Bojanowicz (2015, pp. 132-133) also provides three types of definition of free time. According to this author, residual definitions explain free time as time left after completing all mandatory activities; functional definitions show goals that should be executed in free time, and in the last group of definitions, an important attribute is the feelings of individuals as to the activity in their free time, which allows to emphasize the subjectivity of the concept of free time.

However, Mastrothanas and Kladaki (2020) point to the existence of two types of free time definitions: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative definitions consider leisure time as the remaining time of working time. It is time not spent on paid or unpaid domestic work, study or personal maintenance (Fisher, 2015; Fisher and Robinson, 2010). Such perception of free time refers to work as a central part of human life and to leisure as its antithesis, because it is undertaken at will and voluntarily (Davidovitch and Soen, 2016). This is a time when a person freely chooses an activity based on inner commitment and motivation and decides to perform activities that do not affect its social partners and are not subject to social requirements or mandatory classifications (Davidovitch and Druckman, 2017; Veal, 2020). Definitions based on qualitative dimensions of free time indicate, however, its personal nature as well as the personal satisfaction of an individual through his/her involvement in activities arising from personal interests. According to these definitions, free time is explained as permission to do what one likes at one's own pace, to participate in the activity of one's choice and the possibility to give it up at any time (Cordes, 2013, p. 3).

The combination of both types of definitions is reflected in the common-sense view of free time. According to Stebbins (2018), in everyday parlance leisure refers both to the time left over after work and to our non-work obligations – often called free time – and to the way we spend that time.

Jarosz (2016) believes that free time can be considered in four dimensions: duration, fragmentation, diversity of activities, and complexity of time-use sequences. The first two are quantitative dimensions, while the others define qualitative dimensions of leisure. Even though the duration of leisure is held constant, the diversity of leisure activities remains a dimension of significant differentiation depending on the professional status of an individual.

Kwilecki (2011, pp. 9-10) has a similar opinion and indicates that free time can be described both in quantitative terms, as the amount of free time measured in minutes or hours, and in more complex categories taking into account the nature, type and characteristics of the undertaken activity. The quantitative aspect is measurable and is the basis for the analysis of the time budget, whereas the qualitative aspect of free time refers to the quality of life. Both aspects of free time are very important - the quality of work, training and professional development, everyday well-being and health depend on the amount of time and ways of using it. A person guided by the belief in the high value of free time organizes his/her professional activity and school education to create a relatively large pool of free time, and education, to be effective, should cover all spheres of human life activity, including his/her free time.

According to Orłowska (2011, p. 19), free time is characterized by three specific constitutive attributes. These are voluntariness resulting from autonomy, hedonism understood as pleasure from spending free time, and the non-commercialism related to the non-material dimension of free time. Mokras-Grabowska (2015) has a similar opinion, which indicates that the essential features of free time are: voluntary content and forms of behaviour, non-commercialism and satisfaction.

According to Mroczkowska (2011, p. 8), free time is an element of everyday life that is much easier to experience and live than to define. That is why it is difficult to indicate any rule or a certain set of attributes relevant only for free time and the attributes clearly assigned to it. The same event may be subject to a different cognitive and interpretative frame, and only by penetrating its qualitative and experiential subjectivity it becomes possible to determine whether the same activity is for an individual a voluntary activity equated with free time and rest, or an obligation subject to the logic of work. According to Truszkowska-Wojtkowiak (2016), this is related to the problem of the balance between work and free time, because at work we observe situations typical of free time behaviour, while free time is used to satisfy professional ambitions. The author also emphasizes that in the process of using free time, the culture of free time, understood as the skills resulting from upbringing and preparation for that time, is important. Therefore, free time situations are experienced subjectively – individually by each human being, depending on his/her predispositions, differently in various cultures, places and time (Truszkowska-Wojtkowiak, 2014).

Kwilecki (2011, pp. 5, 11) suggests that the choice of forms of spending free time is influenced by both interests, hobbies, age, gender, economic status and sexual dimorphism. The manner of its use is equally determined by personal attitudes and tastes, as well as real life conditions: time, resources, content and nature of work. For Niezgoda (2014, p. 102), the way of spending free time is therefore strongly conditioned by the social, economic and civilizational environment of the individual.

In conclusion of this part of the article, it is worth recalling another view about free time by Kosiewicz (2012, pp. 77-81) that the individual does not have free time in relation both to the past as well as present and future. There is only the concept of

busy and not busy time, where all the activities we undertake are carried out in the time free from other forms of activity (related to and not related to work). Even when we give in to pleasures, it is not free time, but it is busy because of these pleasures.

3. Method and the research sample characteristics

The analysis of the selected own research results carried out in this study refers to the respondents' daily time budget and clearly distinguished free time. The time budget studies provide information on many aspects of life, including the distribution of time used in various spheres of life. They provide information on how the organization of the time of the population changes in relation to the changes taking place in the economy and social life, and yet this is important, practically useful and interesting knowledge about social and economic reality. In Poland such studies are carried out by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) which applies the direct interview method with paper questionnaires. The obtained answers allow for determining the structure of the daily time budget, developed on the basis of the index of the duration of activities over a day in the human life cycle. This cycle is changing along with the following stages and accepted social roles – from the youth and school years, through being adult-parent and employee, to pensioner (CSO, 2016, p. 17). Each of these stages is characterized by different needs, reflected in the type and intensity of activities performed. The time that individuals have at their disposal within 24 hours is divided into 10 main groups of activities, i.e. (CSO, 2016):

- satisfying physiological needs (e.g. sleeping, eating, time for personal hygiene etc.),
- professional work,
- learning (at school and at the university),
- housework,
- voluntary work in organizations,
- using the mass media (e.g. watching TV, listening to the radio),
- social life (e.g. social meetings, cinema, cultural events),
- personal interests (e.g. computer and the Internet, hobbies),
- participation in sport and recreation,
- commuting.

In the study on the time budget, activities classified into groups 6 to 9, i.e. the use of mass media, social life, personal interest and sport or recreation are considered those to be decided by an individual and constitute free time (leisure time). The structure of the daily time budget, developed on the basis of an indicator of the duration of activities per day, changes throughout the human life cycle along with its successive stages and adopted social roles – from adolescent through adult (parent and employee) to pensioner (CSO, 2016). On average, more free time is available to children, seniors, pensioners and non-working young people.

The authors' own studies, whose results are analysed in this paper, were carried out twice, at the beginning of 2018 and 2020. The basic method of collecting

research material was a diagnostic survey with the use of a questionnaire developed by the author. The subject of the survey was the time management of the selected group of full-time students, and the main goal of the research was to analyse how the respondents use their time and to present the diversity in the forms of time management depending on their gender and professional status. In addition to questions regarding the characteristics of the surveyed population (three questions), the questionnaire included eight questions related to: the division of day time into various forms of students' activity on weekdays and free days, the most popular form of spending free time, the form of spending free time associated with the largest expense, forms of activities for which students do not have time, and about feeling of stress and boredom in their free time. The survey mainly addressed the quantitative aspects of students' free time management, considering the qualitative aspect only marginally. The study includes selected results of the conducted surveys.

In 2018 the research sample consisted of 267 respondents, students of the first and second year of the full-time, first-cycle studies at two Polish universities – 123 students of the Wrocław University of Economics and Business, Branch in Jelenia Góra (WUEB), and 144 students of the University of Szczecin, Faculty of Economics and Management (US). In 2020 the research sample consisted of 205 respondents, students of the first and second year of the full-time, first-cycle studies – 86 students of the WUEB and 115 students of the US. While conducting the analysis, in order to capture the possible differences in the obtained results, the division of the surveyed students into these two research groups was taken into account. Other characteristics of the research sample are presented in Table 1. In the entire study sample of 468 students surveyed, women predominated (58.3%). Female respondents constituted 53.7% of the respondents in the US, and 66.5% of the respondents in the WUEB (see Figure 1). An assessment of the structure of academic youth carried out by gender showed that in 2018 women (59.6%) were in majority, while men were only 40.4% of the surveyed population. Among students of the WUEB, women predominated as 64.2% of the students surveyed. Among the students of the US, the share of women was lower and amounted to 56.6% of the surveyed population. A similar structure of respondents is visible in the research from 2020 – women were in majority (56.7%) in the surveyed population.

Table 1. Respondents by time and place of research and gender

Specification	Number of respondents	Structure (%)	US, number of respondents		WUEB, number of respondents	
			Women	Men	Women	Men
Total sample	468	100.0	134	125	139	70
2018 sample	267	57.1	80	64	79	44
2020 sample	201	42.9	54	61	60	26

Source: own elaboration.

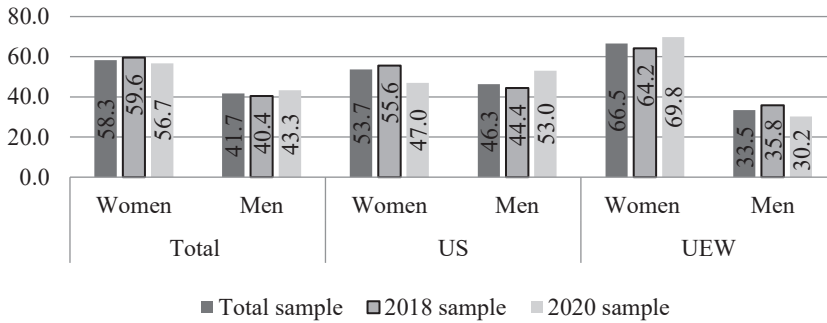


Fig. 1. Structure of respondents by gender

Source: own elaboration.

Among respondents of the WUEB, women predominated representing 69.8% of the students surveyed. Among the respondents of the US, the share of women was lower and amounted to 47.0% of surveyed population. The structure of respondents by gender and source of income may be important not only in relation to the diversity of forms of spending their free time. In this paper, the analysis of the results of own research will be carried out only with regard to the professional status of respondents determining their sources of income, and the diversity of results depending on the gender of respondents is the research problem of another study.

4. Forms of spending free time by the surveyed students depending on their employment status – analysis of own research results

Table 2 shows the number of respondents by employment status, time and place of research. In the entire study sample, the largest number of respondents (225) were financially dependent on their parents, and the smallest (52) worked to support themselves. Those financially dependent on their parents constituted 48.1% and the respondents financially independent accounted for 11.1% of all the respondents in both years in total (Figure 2). However, the structure according to the professional status of the total number of respondents was different, taking into account their division into universities. Students financially dependent on parental assistance accounted for 52.9% of all respondents from the US, and at the WUEB the share of such respondents was lower by more than 10 pp.

The surveys indicate that in the analysed years the structure of the respondents changed according to income sources. At both universities the share of respondents who were financially dependent on their parents declined (by over 10 pp at the US and over 13 pp at the WUEB) and the share of respondents working to support themselves (from 10.4% to 14.8% at the US and from 8.9 % to 10.5% at the WUEB) and financially supported by their parents, and working increased (by 11 pp on US

Table 2. Respondents by employment status

Number of respondents	Total sample	US	WUEB	2018		2020	
				US	WUEB	US	WUEB
Total	468	259	209	144	123	115	86
Financially dependent on parents (FD)	225	137	89	83	59	54	30
Financially independent – working for own living (FI)	52	32	20	15	11	17	9
Mixed – financially supported by parents and working professionally (M)	191	90	100	46	53	44	47

Source: own elaboration.

and 16 pp on WUEB). Thus, the conducted own research confirms the conclusion of other studies cited in this article that an increasing number of students take up work counting on the related financial benefits and the opportunity to gain experience and new skills.

In theory the increasing number of working students should influence changes in the distribution of the respondents' daily time budget, a reduction of their free time, as well as the types of activities undertaken in their free time. According to the groups of daily activities specified in the CSO's studies, free time is the time available to the student after satisfying physiological needs (sleep, meals, hygiene), after fulfilling student and professional duties as well as their role of being a family member. After cutting out time dedicated to the above-mentioned activities, on average, the free time of the surveyed students on a weekday was equal to 6.7 hours in 2018, and on a free day 8.6 hours. In 2020 it was longer and amounted to 7.4 on a weekday and 8.7 hours on a day off. The extension of free time onto weekdays is not a surprise if one looks back to the demographic, regulatory and technological conditions referred to in the introduction.

The surveyed students allocate their free time to various forms of activity (Table 3). The research shows that forms of spending free time by students are determined by their professional status. In the entire research sample, students who are exclusively financially dependent on their parents and thus gain some extra time, spend their free time with their families (63.9% and 62.9% of the respondents from each of these groups, respectively), rest (58.5% and 60.7%) and listen to music and watch TV (54.5% and 43.1%). They spend the least time on housework (cleaning, DIY) and learning. Students working professionally dedicate their free time mainly to rest (54.7%), they listen to music (47.4%) and spend time with their families (43.8%). Least frequently they spend their free time on learning (13.9%) and reading (16.7%).

In the group of financially independent respondents from the US, the largest part of their free time was spent on sleeping and resting, and the smallest was dedicated

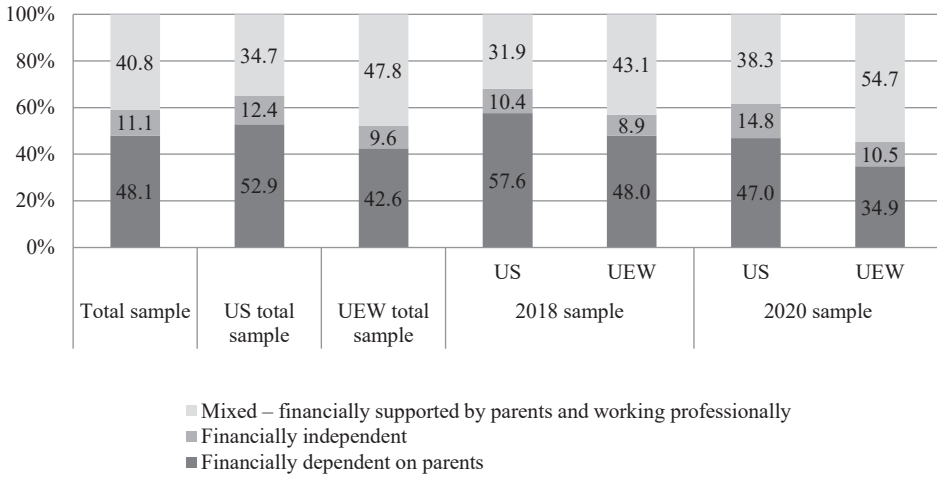


Fig. 2. Structure of respondents by employment status

Source: own elaboration.

to study. Students who are exclusively dependent on their parents spend their free time with families, relax and listen to music. They spend the least time for household chores. In turn, students who are dependent on their parents but earn some extra money in their free time usually relax and spend time with family and friends. They spend least free time on entertainment, playing on computer and studying.

In the group of WUEB students surveyed, the structure of using free time is slightly different. The group of financially independent respondents most often dedicate their free time to resting and listening to music or watching TV, and rarely to playing sports. Students who are exclusively financially dependent on their parents usually spend their free time with families and rest, and spend least time on sports. In turn, students who are dependent on their parents but who also earn money in their free time usually spend time with family and friends, and relax. They allocate least amount of their free time to housework.

The largest change that occurred in the analyzed period refers to the financially independent group of respondents. The structure of using their free time has changed significantly. While in 2018 as many as 64.4% listened to music and watched TV in their free time. in 2020 only 28.4% of students working to support themselves devoted their free time to this activity. In 2020. the share of financially independent respondents definitely increased. with regard to those spending their free time sleeping (by 32 pp). studying (by 12 pp) and playing sports (by more than 11 pp). In the other two groups distinguished by their professional status there was also such a positive shift in the use of free time for sport and learning. As a positive

Table 3. Respondents' forms of spending free time, by professional status

Specification		I take a rest	I catch up on sleep	I read	I listen to music or watch TV	I spend time with family or friends	I go out	I practice sports	I do household chores (cleaning, DIY)	I use the computer for entertainment	I learn	I engage in my favourite pastime or hobby
Total sample	FD	58.5	38.7	26.9	54.5	63.9	40.0	22.5	17.1	23.9	22.9	19.8
	FI	54.7	38.5	16.7	47.4	43.8	29.3	25.8	34.5	33.7	13.9	36.8
	M	60.7	41.2	18.7	43.1	62.9	34.5	33.1	19.1	29.9	18.5	27.3
2018 sample	FD	57.1	41.7	25.1	51.7	61.9	37.9	20.3	15.8	24.6	16.3	27.8
	FI	58.5	22.4	19.1	66.4	50.6	24.5	20.0	20.3	36.1	7.9	53.0
	M	53.2	46.4	21.1	44.4	61.3	37.3	31.7	16.4	37.8	18.5	42.2
2020 sample	FD	59.8	35.7	28.7	57.4	65.9	42.0	24.8	18.3	23.1	29.4	11.9
	FI	51.0	54.6	14.4	28.4	36.9	34.0	31.7	48.7	31.4	19.9	20.6
	M	68.2	35.9	16.4	41.7	64.6	31.6	34.5	21.9	21.9	18.6	12.4
US total sample	FD	59.8	44.6	25.3	51.2	61.4	43.9	27.5	13.2	29.3	18.9	21.0
	FI	44.3	45.7	18.8	41.8	38.0	31.8	40.6	33.1	28.0	12.2	37.3
	M	59.1	35.3	16.6	42.2	56.7	29.8	42.3	18.9	32.0	12.3	29.8
WUEB total sample	FD	57.1	32.9	28.5	57.9	66.4	36.1	17.6	21.0	18.5	26.8	18.6
	FI	65.2	31.3	14.6	53.0	49.5	26.8	11.1	35.9	39.4	15.7	36.4
	M	62.2	47.0	20.9	43.9	69.2	39.1	23.8	19.4	27.7	24.8	24.8

Source: own elaboration.

change in the use of free time. one can also note the decrease in 2020 in the group of students who (regardless of their professional status) allocate their free time to using a computer for entertainment. However, we should remember that the widespread use of smartphones does not mean shortening the time for using Internet portals or playing games.

5. Conclusion

Free time is a very important element of everyday life. Although the decision on how to spend it is made by individuals, the form of spending free time depends on many factors, among which the most important are: individual needs, age, gender, education, behaviour patterns and professional status (financial standing). Such decisions also depend on social and economic conditions.

The conducted research seems to confirm this observation. Although students are a very diverse social group and one specific, favoured way of spending their free time cannot be identified, they have one thing in common: they increasingly start

working during their studies. In the examined period this was mainly due to the good economic situation as well as the statutory decrease in the number of school hours. This influences the change of forms of their free time activity, which according to the research results also depends on the time and place of the conducted surveys.

The research also shows that those surveyed students who work to support themselves, choose such forms of spending their free time that are not associated with incurring significant expense. In their free time, more often than other groups of students, they stay at home resting, sleeping, listening to music and watching TV. In their case, self-earned income seems to be allocated to daily maintenance, and not to more expensive forms of spending free time. However, clear confirmation of this observation requires further in-depth study.

The analysis presented in this article was related to the selected, quantitative aspects of the use of free time by the respondents. According to behavioural economics and neuroeconomics, psychological factors and emotions might also decide on the forms of free time use and its valuation. The assessment of intensity of the selected emotions (boredom and stress) in relation to the respondent's gender and professional status will be the subject of further analysis of the time budget of the surveyed students.

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CZAS WOLNY I JEGO WYKORZYSTANIE A STATUS ZAWODOWY RESPONDENTÓW – WYBRANE WYNIKI DWUKROTNYCH BADAŃ ZASOBU CZASU WOLNEGO STUDENTÓW

Streszczenie: Celem opracowania jest badanie dobowego budżetu czasu studentów i struktury ich czasu wolnego oraz ukazanie ewentualnych różnic gospodarowania czasem wolnym w zależności od statusu zawodowego respondentów. Podstawową metodą zbierania materiału badawczego był sondaż diagnostyczny, którego podstawą był kwestionariusz autorskiej ankiety. Badania przeprowadzono w latach 2018 i 2020 w każdym roku w dwóch ośrodkach akademickich w Polsce. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że studenci stanowią bardzo zróżnicowaną grupę społeczną pod względem wybieranych aktywności w czasie wolnym oraz występują wyraźne różnice w sposobie spędzania przez nich czasu wolnego związane ze źródłem ich utrzymania.

Słowa kluczowe: czas wolny, formy spędzania czasu wolnego, studenci, badania własne.