

Concepts, spaces, and leisure practices from the perspective of youth

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Abstract - Aim: To investigate how the choices of young people for public or private spaces during their leisure practices, regardless of gender and age group, can be a starting point for the definition of agendas for the constitution of governmental public policies. **Methods:** The empirical task was accomplished through the application of electronic questionnaires to young university students from Portugal (20%), Brazil (70%), and South Africa (10%). The sample consisted of 705 randomly chosen young people, with an average age of 24 years. The data were analyzed using SPSS and content analysis. The analysis was divided into three categories: comprising the student's profile; referring to leisure and relating to the provision of leisure and space. **Results:** The youngest people choose the public spaces for their leisure practices and conceive leisure as a moment when they can do whatever they want, without obligations, followed by leisure as fun and free time. There is no difference between men and women in the concept of leisure. The main conclusions highlighted that leisure means to 'do what I want without any obligation to do so', followed by 'fun' and 'free time, and young people like to 'go out with friends, 'play sports' and 'do nothing'. The public space is the most used for leisure. **Conclusion:** The meaning of leisure is loaded with subjectivities, so we understand that the demands for political actions that enable the use of public spaces safely and with quality are the way to guarantee the rights of the population.

Keywords: youth, leisure, public policies.

Introduction

Young people have specific cultures and practices that characterize a peculiar condition, whether in the world of work or during their leisure practices.

It can be understood that young people are in a certain defined age range or as a transition phase from childhood to adulthood¹, a period of human life characterized by physical, biological, and psychological changes², and a moment of passage and preparation in which individuals are at imminent risk of getting lost³. The World Health Organization and the United Nations characterize young people as people aged between 15 and 24 years^{4,5}. In Brazil, this age group is extended to 29 years, according to the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) of the Presidency of the Republic and the National Policy for Youth^{6,7}.

As we have seen, we cannot characterize young people solely by chronology or social issues, but by the interrelation of all aspects that comprise human formation.

Furthermore, the youth relationships will, in this way, differentiate this population, especially during leisure practices due to the cultural manifestations expressed and the developed and acquired cultural capital⁸, which is influenced by social changes and their impacts on youth sociability⁹. This thought leads us to reflect on these new generations and their behavior in modern societies, which stand out for being technological, as well as being immediate and fluid^{10,11}.

In this article, leisure is understood as a social right as determined in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of Brazil of 1988 and must be guaranteed to the entire population by State intervention, through the implementation of public policies. In a broader perspective, leisure is understood as a human need, and the practices are developed according to each culture. The term 'public policy' can be defined from theories based on sociology, political science, or even economics. Different definitions try to explain how the state, politics, economics, and society are

related¹², assuming, in general, a holistic view of the theme, since the public policy is multidisciplinary.

Public policies are represented as the government in action, i.e., the field of policies that studies what the actions are when they happen and for what or who they are formulated¹². Because leisure is a constitutional right, and because we understand the needs of young people concerning guaranteeing this right, we are very concerned about how governments constitute their agendas when it comes to the establishment of public policies for the youth, and the way they serve this very special population, with such peculiar behaviour.

This article has two main contributions, the first directly addresses the interest in supply and demand for leisure practices by the youth, in order to highlight the establishment of agendas for the development of policies that directly address youth in its nuances, needs, and cultures, so that the youth of the current generation can fit their youthful condition in society and develop their sociability processes. The second deals with the opportunity for young people to meet the demands, conceptions, and leisure practices of their generation and recognize themselves as part of this process, including the formation of a resistance group that seeks to guarantee their social and citizens' rights.

Based on this premise, this article aimed to investigate how the choices of young people for public or private spaces during their leisure practices, regardless of gender and age group, can be a starting point for the definition of agendas for the constitution of governmental public policies.

Theoretical approaches

Youth

The concept of youth went through several labels referring to the behaviour of young people of each era. Labels related to a certain age group, and associated with social problems, such as 'juvenile delinquency. Sometimes the young person was labeled as alienated and passive, sometimes as the protagonist of political, social, and cultural transformations of a given time, such as those who would be responsible for transforming society¹³.

Dayrell¹⁴, Pais¹⁵, and Sposito¹⁶ claim that the use of the term 'youth' in the singular is insufficient, as there is no single definition that considers all the existing dimensions. We must use the word 'youths' in the plural, to speak of the diversity of ways of being young, 'Since factors such as gender, social, cultural, and financial condition, among others, mark specific youths'¹⁷ and whatever the established age group, young people of equal age live unequal youths^{18,19}.

The conceptions of youth relate the statistical and biological categories to historical and cultural categories

and present different themes that must be considered, such as chronological age, the generations issue, social postponement, and vital postponement. The age group linked to history and culture distinguishes a generation, while the social postponement portrays the period of life where there is no commitment and responsibility²⁰.

The public policies

In summary, public policies are related to what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes, because public policies can influence the lives of all people. There are several definitions for the term, based on different references from areas such as Social Sciences, Political Science, and Social Service, among others. 'To debate Public Policies is to treat, almost obligatorily, of interdisciplinarity. The area of knowledge in question is the product of the integration of several other areas of knowledge'²¹ (p. 77). As an area of knowledge and academic discipline, public policies emerge in the United States, unlike in Europe, with an emphasis on the study of government action. In the United States, the strand that talks about political science came to be instituted in the early 1950s, under the label of Policy Science, whereas in Europe, this concern only gained strength from the 1970s²². American social scientists Harold Lasswell²³, Herbert Simon²⁴, Charles Lindblom²⁵, and David Easton²⁶ are considered the founders of the study of public policy as an autonomous scientific area, due to the work developed around the 1950s¹².

David Easton²⁶ defines public policies as a system that 'receives input from parties, the media and interest groups, which influence its results and effects'¹² (p. 24). Easton²⁶ develops the application that goes from the systemic approach to the analysis of public policies. The author addresses the relationship between the political process, public policies, and the respective social, economic, and political contexts. The public policies are, in his model, an output of the political system, which reveals the emergence, nature, and activity of the State. In this sense, Easton²⁶ understands that 'each part of the larger political canvas does not stand alone but is related to each other part; or, to put it positively, that the operation of no one part can be fully understood without reference to how the whole itself operates' (p. 383).

Public policy can also be considered and understood as a state intervention strategy, that is, of those responsible for the management of actions that aim to achieve certain results or produce effects with respect to a problem or a sector of society²⁷. It is worth remembering that, although a public policy implies a political decision, not every political decision becomes a public policy. Regarding the definitions of public policies, several concepts can be mentioned, however, what is assumed in this article, in general, is that public policy is about government in action. What to do, why to do it, for what and for whom to

do it, putting into practice the plans of a political proposal transformed into action in order to solve a problem or issue of society. Thus, from the theoretical and conceptual perspective, public policy and social policy are multi-disciplinary fields^{28,12}.

Studying public policy means studying the government in action. In addition, it is necessary to consider that public policies influence and are influenced by values and ideals that guide the relationship between state and society. The action is the result of a cycle, consisting of a dynamic and learning process, which takes place in four stages: formulation, execution, monitoring, and evaluation^{29,30}. These approaches characterize the definition of the agenda, which can be formulated by focusing on the problems, assuming that it is necessary to do something about them, with an emphasis on the policy itself, that is, to build awareness about the need to do something. On the other hand, the definition of the agenda also considers the participants, who can be the media, politicians, academics, parties, and pressure groups. These define agendas and alternatives. It is the government that makes decisions about problem situations and designs policies to solve them or minimize the issues considered problematic¹². The policies will materialize, according to a political system that will generate points or groups of different vetoes and support, in a dispute over its decision.

The public policies can be constituted with functions in the distributive, redistributive, or regulatory perspective, fostering the debate about the performance of the State, and, thus, transforming themselves more into incentive policies and less into government spending structures²⁹. But it is worth mentioning that there are four formats or types of public policies: distributive - government decisions according to groups, thus generating impacts that are more individual than collective; regulatory policies - involving bureaucracy, politicians, and interest groups; redistributive policies - in general, are universal policies; and, finally, constitutive policies - that deal with procedures²⁹. For Frey²², these four forms of policy characterize the effects of the means of implementation applied to the contents of policies, concerning the solution of political conflicts.

In addition to definitions and concepts, it is important to note that some authors^{22,31} corroborate the fact that the study of public leisure policies in Brazil is still very recent, emphasizing, mostly, two aspects: the analysis of structures and institutions and the characterization of the negotiation processes of specific sectoral policies. As they are incipient, such studies need a theoretical basis, which would help in the search for a greater degree of generalization of the results obtained²².

Leisure

Leisure is not an isolated phenomenon, it manifests itself in different contexts, according to the dialectical

relationships that people build with the world. Thus, it is a dialectical phenomenon and, even if people are looking for satisfaction, greater flexibility, and freedom of choice, they will not always be exempt from social, family, professional, and other obligations. Therefore, there are no absolute boundaries between work and leisure, nor between leisure and everyday obligations.

In this way, leisure is understood as part of the culture, expressed either individually or collectively, based on a conquest of time and space constituted in the face of the relations of needs and obligations, especially with work³². It will establish itself with four elements as a reference: time, space-place, cultural manifestations, personal actions, and attitudes. The question of time refers to enjoying leisure at present and not just at specific and institutionalized moments, such as vacations, and weekends, among others; the experiences from the different and diverse cultural manifestations that make it possible to experience leisure as fun, amusement or rest, in its multiple forms of experience and manifestation, articulated, in turn, with actions or attitudes as human expressions based on playfulness, which characterizes the free choice of leisure. Therefore, this definition of leisure brings us elements that can contribute to the reflection on its concept and its understanding as a social right.

A concept cannot explain all the particularities, desires, and priorities of such different practices, because leisure is a complex historical and social fabric that characterizes life, in its various social dimensions, it is made of threads culturally constructed in the network of meanings of human life. Furthermore, as leisure is shaped by the peculiarities of the historical, social, and cultural context of which it is a part, it needs to be understood as a socially, politically, culturally, and historically situated phenomenon³³. Therefore, the conceptions are multiple and bring representations of cultural, social, and educational practices.

Thus, leisure is related to three elements: culture, the relationship between time and space, and playfulness. When talking about the approach to culture, it is worth remembering that there are countless conceptions of the term, which can be defined from diverse currents. Still in the logic of culture, and the cultural manifestations that constitute leisure, are social practices experienced as enjoyment of culture, which can be of the most different orders, such as a party, game, play, walk, trip, diverse corporal practices, dance, spectacle, theater, music, cinema, painting, drawing, sculpting, handicrafts, literature and poetry, virtual and electronic activities, among other countless possibilities that permeate both individual and collective interests, uniquely, being experienced playfully, in the social time and space. Leisure can also comprise cultural practices more focused on introspective possibilities - such as meditation, contemplation, and relaxation - which can also constitute leisure experiences, due to their potential for reflection³³.

Methods

The sample consisted of 705 young students, randomly chosen in the university environment. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CAAE) at the UFMG, with the number 28291614.9.0000.5149.

The empirical task was accomplished through the application of electronic questionnaires to young university students from Portugal (Faculty of Sports of the University of Porto, FADE-UP, and Lusophone University of Humanities and Technologies of Lisbon, ULHT), from Brazil (Federal University of Minas Gerais, UFMG) and South Africa (University of Western Cape, UWC). These young people were chosen at random from the mentioned universities and answered the questionnaires in 2018. The questionnaire has been translated into English for the South African students.

This study had as its main task to investigate how the choices of young people for public or private spaces during their leisure practices, regardless of sex and age group, can be a starting point for the definition of agendas for the constitution of governmental public policies. The investigation variables were a) places to have leisure practices and b) the conception of leisure. The research design was based on qualitative and quantitative research, with a sample determined by the point of saturation criterion, which in social research, summarized by Chamon and Chamon³⁴ occurs: ‘When the spectrum of opinions is fully investigated, i.e., when the data collected does not offer new categories or representations, the saturation of qualitative research is reached’, thus there are mechanisms, which involve the analysis of repetitions of the information obtained to justify the limitation of the work to a certain extent. The author also adds: ‘The sample of a research cannot be determined previously, as it is not possible to guarantee from which point the saturation is reached, except by observing, collecting and analyzing’, therefore there is no way to define the exact number without starting the field survey. Social research depends on options³⁰ and the research that was conducted is micro-sociological and focused on a specific moment in the trajectory of individuals, which we recognize to be built on the previous history and to have a teleological sense, and we can't enter this period. For this work, we also consider, in agreement with Geertz³⁵, Elias, and Scotson³⁶ that a person does not live outside of society or its cultural web, just as there is no purely mental activity, separate and distinct from the reality in which the person lives; in short, all existence is social, interdependent, and ecological.

The data were analyzed in full, by using the SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics version 19)³⁷ and categorized later, based on the content analysis technique Bardin³⁸. Based on the problem pointed out, it was decided to determine categories with delimiting dimensions and predetermined variables, in order to answer the start-

ing question. Category 1 has as its limiting dimension the outline of the student's profile: sex and age group. Category 2 has leisure as its dimension, the variables for analysis are the concept of leisure and leisure practices with the indicators determined in the questionnaire, to learn what young people think about leisure and what they do in their leisure practice. Category 3 has as its dimension the offer of leisure and the characterization of the space for leisure as public (referring to the space that has collective use and available to the population in general) or private (referring to the space that is private use, with restricted access, mainly financial).

Results

Category 1: profile

Presenting the profile is important to characterize the sample that was composed of men and women predominantly aged over 24 years. This age group is classified as young and commonly found in the university environment, as provided methodologically.

In relation to the countries investigated, most students are Brazilian, followed by Portuguese and South African students, who were not very interested in participating in the research when they received the link, and right at the first contact refused to participate.

When we cross the data referring to sex and the countries of origin, we noticed the predominance of responses made by men, except in Brazil.

Category 2: leisure

The purpose of the dimension of leisure was to learn about the concept and practices of leisure from the perspective of the young people investigated. We base this questioning on the perspective of⁴⁰ who see leisure as a subjective practice, with possibilities of actions that are constituted and built playfully, starting from a time earned, yet limited.

As can be seen in [Figure 1](#), the answers are in line with the concept adopted by this article, in which leisure is represented by personal intentionality, with its meanings and marked by the culture of the persons involved. Most of the data highlight that young people are interested in their leisure time and that their meaning represents a moment of encounter with themselves in order to be able to perform recreational activities that are in agreement with their interests. Mostly young people conceive leisure as a moment when they can do whatever they want, without obligations, followed by leisure as fun and free time.

It is worth noting that to conceive leisure in its most intimate relationship with the subjectivity of free time is to prioritize individual freedom of choice, emphasizing the subjectivity of leisure and its relationship with culture. When we relate men and women to the concept of leisure,

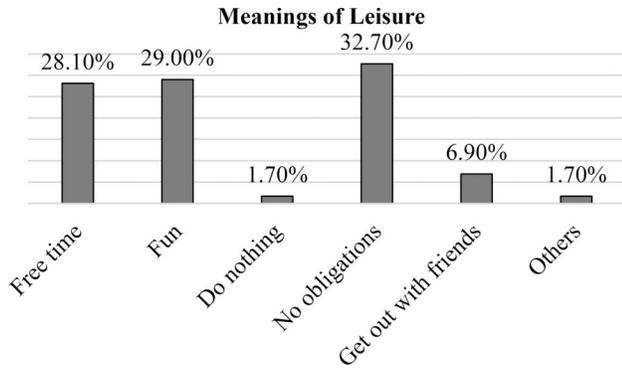


Figure 1 - Meanings of Leisure for the young people.

we realize that there is no difference related to the way young people think about leisure.

As for nationality, the Portuguese stood out, compared to other young people in their conception that leisure means doing whatever they want without obligations and fun. South Africans, on the other hand, stood out in regards to the concept related to free time.

Starting from the concept of leisure, the lifestyle adopted by young people differs in relation to countries and sex, but without significant data, young people are interested in fluidly living their life and with a focus on the present time, as Bauman¹⁰ and Lipovetsky¹¹, 2009, state. It is worth mentioning that during the investigation, the young respondents could give more than one answer when asked about what they liked to do during their leisure time.

What most young people do during their leisure is going out with friends, followed by playing sports and doing nothing, characteristics very close to what Pais¹⁵ highlights, when it comes to youth cultures, when stating that young people like to relate with young people. These are the characteristics of the so-called 'urban tribes'³⁹ that are organized into groups that share the same interests and practices. It is worth mentioning that young Portuguese people stand out in their interest in the practice of sports, which we can see that this fact can be corroborated by the very situation of the country that has a great incentive to practice sports from childhood in schools, as well as in public squares and parks. In South Africa, on the other hand, sports have always been very segregating, thus not generating as much interest and mass practice.

Finally, we note that in fact leisure is conceived subjectively by young people, with due similarities that are characterized mainly by the typical conceptions of cultures established by this age group.

Category 3: space for leisure

The dimension focused on the use and offer of space for leisure was divided into public and private spaces, in order to relate the offers of public leisure policies with the interests of young people.

Public space is characterized as an integral part of the urban space, where meetings and possibilities of social relations take place, with free access (except for agencies and buildings that although the public is destined for specific purposes, such as courts, city halls, etc.), regardless of social and economic condition, religion or ethnicity, in addition to offering accessibility, comfort, and security, its maintenance is incumbent upon the government. The private spaces are those owned by companies or citizens and intended for specific actions, for example, shopping centres, shops, etc. Thus, in these spaces, the maintenance, security, and accessibility are the responsibility of their owners.

We can see in Figure 2, that most young people choose the public spaces for their leisure practices as explained in Figure 2, which were reported as parks and squares that are very common in Portugal and in Brazil, the latter mainly with government action through the offer of programmes and projects developed in these spaces.

As for the use of private spaces, these spaces were named a shopping centre, sports centre, and spaces for food, such as pubs and restaurants, in addition to the houses where young people live (Figure 3). Young people also frequent these spaces, but as a second option, mainly

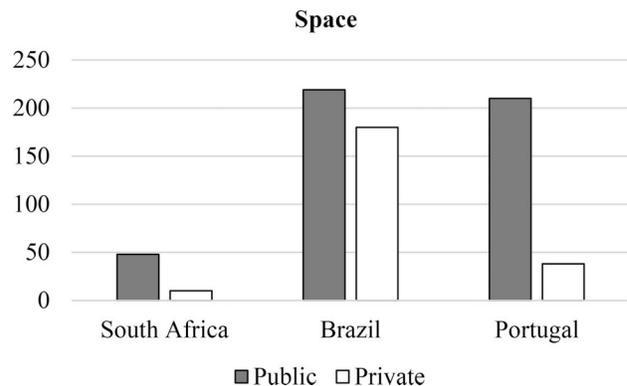


Figure 2 - Spaces chose for leisure practice per country.

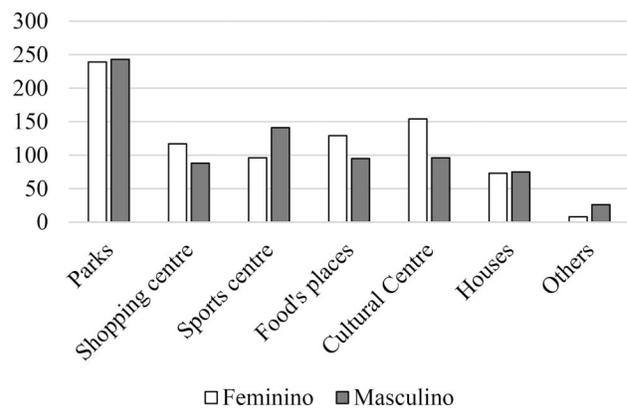


Figure 3 - Private spaces are chosen for leisure practice per sex.

due to financial hardship, since most of the private spaces are linked to an economic relationship.

It is worth noting that the relationship between the use of public space by young people can occur through simple use, according to the specific determinations of each space, or even through its re-signification, based on the interests of each group and even on the relationships of resistance to social oppression, related to gender, ethnicity, social stratum, etc., or as a relief from social impositions.

Finally, the use of space for leisure practices is increasingly being re-signified, due to the need for expression on the part of the population, and on the other hand, the need to use urban space, especially the population, due to the daily worsening of the social inequalities.

Conclusion

Seeking to dialogue with young people's conceptions about leisure and the uses they make of spaces for their practices, the data pointed us to a very interesting conclusion, which is exactly the need for equipment, spaces, and programs that enable young people to express themselves, to let their culture and their playful desires flow. This look refers to the speeches of young people and the appropriation of spaces determined by them, while the participation in government programs or projects does not stand out, but the use of public space in order to allow them to enjoy their leisure practices.

So, to recapitulate, this study sought to know what the leisure practices of young people from three different countries (Brazil, South Africa, and Portugal) are, as well as their options for spaces for the practice of leisure, according to their conceptions, so that we can identify how these interests and practices can influence the political agendas for determining actions. We emphasize the importance of this study as a 'diagnoses of interests that can support the development of plans, programmes, and public leisure policies for youth.

For most survey respondents, leisure has the meaning of 'doing whatever I want, without obligations', followed by 'fun' and 'free time. When asked about what they do in their leisure practices, most young people answered that they like to go out with friends, practice sports, and do nothing. Most of the young people interviewed use the public space for the practice of leisure activities. However, when separated by sex, women prefer private spaces and men prefer public spaces. Regarding the spaces offered for leisure, women indicate 'parks and squares', 'cultural spaces', and 'food' as their preferences. Men also indicate parks and squares, but in second place "sports centres". The meaning of leisure related to the use of spaces is in its essence loaded with subjectivities, especially when dealing with young people, who have cultures, knowledge, and needs specific to the age group to which they belong.

In this sense, as has been said, public policies can be motivated by the wishes of the population, by political party actions, or by the social agendas that are constituted by the governments, and it is in the face of the agendas that this study comes to focus since the programmes and youth projects should be at the centre of public policy attention, as we have seen young people choose public spaces, they enjoy this possibility, even without having specific programmes that can contribute to their sociability, as well as their technical and personal development. The establishment of governmental actions that serve this population in order to contribute to their leisure practices, through facilitating access, public transport, decentralization of practices, and incentives for participation and involvement in the proposed policies, are part of the needs of young people, who look for opportunities which allow them to culturally express their full potential and thus be able to establish, build and substantiate each one's life projects.

Conceptualizing what leisure is and indicating how they develop their practices during this time allows us to directly or indirectly encourage young people who resist social oppression and who fight for opportunities and offers of public spaces worthy of being visited, with maintenance, conservation, and, above all, safety. In addition, it allows young people to fight for constitutional rights, which must be guaranteed by the State, such as access to education, health, and leisure. Thus, we believe that the public policies should not be actions developed temporarily, but programmes and projects planned, executed, and managed as State policies, which listen to the population and build their direction based on the assessments conducted in order to address the social needs.

In conclusion, and answering to our aim, the public policies can and should start from the wishes, expectations, and needs of the population to which they are destined, through a demand that is the result of observations of daily practices, the uses of public and private spaces and above all by listening to the population. Certainly, the programmes would tend to be more assertive and more successful in their implementation, execution, and evaluation phases, with positive feedback and indeed with attention to guaranteeing the right.

The main limitation of this study was the impossibility to delve deeper into the choices of leisure practices of the young people from those three different countries. In this sense, we propose that further studies may deepen the conceptions of young people in each country so that government agendas can contribute to the personal and social development of young people.

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