

# ANALYSIS OF THE WAY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA SPEND THEIR SUMMER HOLIDAYS

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## Abstract

In the research we tried to analyze the way in which primary and secondary school students spend their summer holidays. The study included 1289 boys and girls - the third, fifth and seventh graders of primary school, and 1601 students from all four grades of secondary schools in Slovenia. The subjects for the sample were systematically chosen according to stratification criteria in order to equally cover the whole area of the Republic of Slovenia. The schools were from urban, industrial and rural environments. Secondary schools were of all types.

The results showed that Slovenian students do not use their holidays as we might have expected. They waste too much time watching TV and playing with videogames or a computer. They do engage themselves in some sport activities, but time spent on them is too short. Students complained that the school is totally inactive; namely, during the summer holidays it offers hardly any programs for them.

The youngsters' declining attitude towards the useful, active and healthy way of spending their spare time will strongly affect their adulthood life style. A negative approach to the active use of free time, as a personal system of values created in youth, may continue to exist in the future as a bad influence or example for the next generations. Therefore, one of the main roles of the sport education process (during the holidays also) is encouragement of children to participate in sport activities. Children should embrace the idea that sport can make life brighter and richer, and that it can neutralize the negative effects of the contemporary style of living.

**Key words:** primary school pupils, secondary school students, summer holidays, spare time activities

## Zusammenfassung:

### DIE ANALYSE DER WEISEN, AUF DIE SLOWENISCHE GRUND- UND MITTELSCHÜLER IHRE SOMMERFERIEN VERBRINGEN

Diese Studie versucht, die Weisen zu analysieren, auf die die Grund- und Mittelschüler in der Republik Slowenien ihre Sommerferien verbringen. Die Studie umfaßte 1289 Mädchen und Jungen der dritten, fünften und siebten Grundschulklassen, sowie 1601 Mittelschüler aus allen vier Klassen. Das Muster wurde systematisch und schichtgleichmäßig aus allen teilen Sloweniens gewählt. Es wurden Schulen aus der urbanen, industriellen und ruralen Umgebung sowie Mittelschulen jeder Art umfaßt.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, daß slowenische Schüler ihre Sommerferien nicht wie erwartet verbringen. Sie verbringen zu viel Zeit fernsehend oder Computer- und Videospiele spielend. Sie treiben auch Sport, aber sie verbrauchen zu wenig Zeit dazu. Die Schüler vermissen eine aktive Rolle der Schule, die während der Sommerferien fast keine Programme anbietet.

Eine negative Stellungnahme der Jugend zur nützlichen, aktiven und gesunden Weise, Freizeit zu verbringen, wird ihre Lebensweise im reifen Alter ernsthaft beeinflussen. Die Abneigung gegen eine aktive Freizeitgestaltung, die aus dem persönlichen, im Kindheit geformten, Wertesystem erfolgt, wird ein schlechtes Beispiel für eigene Kinder. Deswegen wäre eins der wichtigsten Ziele des Sporterziehungsprozesses auch während der Schulferien, Kinder zu ermuntern, an Sporttätigkeiten teilzunehmen. Sie sollten vergewissert werden, daß Sport das Leben anschaulicher und reicher machen sowie die negative Wirkung der modernen Lebensweise neutralisieren kann.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Schüler, Grundschule, Mittelschule, Sommerferien, Freizeit

## Introduction

Contemporary school, the manner of education and training limit the physical activity of children to a great extent. The conservative way of teaching in overcrowded classrooms, too many children in too narrow

corridors, too small gymnasiums, etc., have a negative influence on the school work organization and, inevitably, on the quality and quantity of physical movement. What is more, children do not exercise enough even in their leisure time. They spend most of their time in front of a TV, computer or

with videogames. Parents themselves, who often seek only for material goods and a comfortable life, do not practice a healthy way of living and do not show their kids how to spend any active time outdoors, in nature. Therefore, the data supplied by our health care institutions should not surprise us. The data revealed that the condition of the locomotor system in our students is alarming: 8.2% of pupils have chest deformation, 2% serious spine deformation, 6.4% slight spine deformation, 18.8% have deformed feet and so on (Strel, Štihec, 1993). A lack of movement leads not only to negative changes in health status, but also to negative trends in the morphological and motor development of the children. It was discovered that between 1970 - 1983 the motor ability of children has decreased by 5.8%, and the repetitive power of the shoulder girdle by as much as 21.1% (Strel, Štihec, 1995).

It is known that all dimensions of a psychosomatic status are strongly interrelated with each other. We can not affect only a single aspect without, at least partially, affecting the others. Therefore, we can expect that the negative influence of contemporary school will continue and reflect itself on the child's emotional, intellectual, and social development. Overaggressiveness, nervousness, problems with concentration, irritation, getting tired fast, etc., are typical symptoms in students.

A long time ago old thinkers underlined a thought that we cannot separate the body and the spirit. In his Essays Montaigne said: 'We do not bring up the soul, we do not bring up the body, but a man.' If we add the classic 'A healthy spirit in a healthy body', it becomes obvious that in the school we should not think only about how to fill students' heads with knowledge, but we should also take care of their physical development. One without the other simply cannot exist.

## Problem

Nowadays when the so-called curricular reformation of Slovenian schools is in the limelight, the overloading of our children and its outcomes are often mentioned.

The problem of overloading school children is not new. Jan Amos Komensky, who established a primary school, talked about it. Under the term 'overloading' we understand the psychological and physical strains students have to face during the educational process at certain times. We can talk about the many different types of over-burden: overloading the body, intellectual overloading, overloading the senses, etc. Although each of these overloads appears separately, they are strongly connected and usually combined.

From the morphological, motor, health, psychological and, especially, the socialization point of view, the holidays seem to be viable for the overall development of pupils and for preparing them for the next school year. A more than two-months-long break in study is also an excellent opportunity for creating the life style of every individual. Because of that, we have decided to gather, at least some information about the content, form and quality of spending the summer holidays by the representative sample of Slovenian primary and secondary school students.

## Aims

The basic aims of our research were:

1. To find out and analyze the way Slovenian primary school students spend their summer holidays;
2. To find out and analyze the way Slovenian secondary school students spend their summer holidays.

## Methods

### The sample

As a representative sample of Slovenian primary and secondary school students we took 1289 third, fifth and seventh grade pupils from primary school and 1601 boys and girls from the first to the fourth grade of secondary school. The sample was systematically and stratifically chosen and it equally covered all areas of Slovenia. The schools were from urban, industrial and rural environments. The secondary schools were of all types (grammar schools, technical schools,

vocational schools). In the next step schools from each region as well as students from the different grades were chosen randomly. The data were collected in connection with a larger research program under the title 'The analysis of motor and morphological trends in the development of 7 to 18 year old children and youth, and their connection with psychological and social features'.

There were 10 primary and 14 secondary schools in the final sample.

### Variables

The chosen pupils were asked to complete the questionnaire about the way they spend their summer holidays. The list of schools and the questionnaire are available from the authors.

### Methods of analysis

The data were processed at the Faculty of Sport on a VAX system with the use of a SPSS program. Basic statistic parameters - algorithm frequencies were counted.

## Results and discussion

From the answers to the question 'Where do you spend your summer holidays and how many days are you away from home?' we received some very interesting information. Although the answers are in some parts incomplete they still give us a sufficient picture of the children's life during their summer break.

On the basis of the completed data it is possible to conclude that about 90% of children spend at least part of the vacation away from the place of their permanent residence. Among them 15% spend a part of the holidays with relatives and about 75% go to the seaside, camping or to the mountains alone, together with their parents or with organized groups.

In spite of the above it is necessary to emphasize that most of the time during the holidays students stay at home. If children, alone or with their parents, go for their summer rest away from the place of their permanent residence they, as a rule, leave their homes for a very short time. All sorts of away-from-home resting amounts on average to no more than 14 days. This

period is hardly enough for an effective use of only one kind of summer recreation, of course if we want to obtain certain results. What is more, from those two weeks we still have to subtract the time used for travelling, acclimatization, etc. A wrong attitude towards the regeneration of energy and low economic status of the family both prevent the rational organization of summer recreation. The picture of the summer break would be probably worse if we had a chance to analyze the way our children spend their time on their away-from-home holidays.

If we take a closer look at the process of the upbringing of our children an interesting fact emerges. During the school year it is mostly the school that is in charge of raising the kids, during the holidays the upbringing is exclusively in the competence of the family. These are the two extremes, which certainly cannot be a source of a proper upbringing of our children. It has also nothing in common with the systematic and planned work with the young generation that should take place.

Considering the whole population it is hard to notice any effects of the work of institutions which are supposed to organize the free time for children. Therefore this field also demands some radical changes. Areas of tourism, health care, education, sport and economy together should undoubtedly work out new, modern forms of organizing the spare time for children. This common action should not be just a temporary trend but a long-term strategy, which would allow the young ones a high level of development. It should not become one more way of filling up the country's budget, but must be supported by proper tax relief.

For the question what sports did they do during the holidays (Table 1) primary and secondary school students gave answers almost as we had expected. However, among them there were also a few quite surprising answers.

As we might foresee students choose swimming the most often. Next are cycling, football and tennis. Many children play basketball. Other sports are not so popular.

Table 1: Which sports did you do during the summer holidays?

sport (activity)	No. of answers		percentage (%)	
	P	S	P	S
aerobics		4		0.27
athletics	13	16	1.16	1.08
motor- cross	4		0.36	
badminton	8	16	0.71	1.08
playing boules		4		0.27
baseball		1		0.07
martial arts		7		0.47
ice skating		2		0.13
fitness		9		0.61
golf	1		0.09	
mountain biking		2		0.13
walking in nature	10	24	0.89	1.62
ice hockey	4	1	0.36	0.07
sailing	1	4	0.09	0.27
surfing	2	9	0.18	0.61
horse riding	6	21	0.54	1.42
judo	1	1	0.09	0.07
morning exercises	1		0.09	
canoeing	2	2	0.18	0.13
karate	10	10	0.88	0.67
playing skittles	1	1	0.09	0.07
cycling	208	279	18.59	18.80
roller skating	2	1	0.18	0.07
basketball	57	153	5.09	10.31
air sports		1		0.07
archery	1	2	0.09	0.13
hunting	1	1	0.09	0.07
mini golf	1		0.09	
table tennis	13	9	1.16	0.61
football	125	176	11.17	11.86
volleyball	41	54	3.66	3.64
orienteering		1		0.07
mountain climbing	8	15	0.71	1.01
swimming	361	387	32.26	26.08
dancing	5	13	0.45	0.88
dance (expression)		3		0.20
underwater sports		3		0.20
fishing	2	5	0.18	0.34
handball	23	16	2.06	1.08
roller-blade skating	1		0.09	
squash		1		0.07
skiing	3	1	0.27	0.07
cross-country skiing	1	2	0.09	0.13
water skiing		3		0.20
exercising	3		0.27	
shooting	2	5	0.18	0.34
apparatus gymn.	4	3	0.36	0.20
sports climbing		2		0.13
gymnastics with hand apparatus		1		0.07
camping		1		0.07
cross-country running	75	77	6.70	5.19
tennis	118	135	10.50	9.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>1119</b>	<b>1484</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

PS=Primary schools SS=Secondary schools

The high number of students who played tennis is quite surprising. Apparently the economic conditions in the cities as well as in the country have improved. Additionally some sport grounds of wider use have now been adapted for tennis courts.

If we analyze the children's activity in each sport we can notice that only 20% of the necessary knowledge about a certain sport has its origin in the sports education process. Students gain the remaining part of information in different ways (clubs, societies, self-education, etc.). In our opinion sports teachers should take a closer look at the students' wishes and needs and try to follow them. Physical education programs must be enriched with those contents, which can be

Table 2: How often did you do sport activities during the summer holidays?

	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
did not do any sport activities	136	168	11.16	10.60
rarely (2x45 min. a week)	181	393	14.86	24.79
a few times a week	498	609	40.89	38.42
every day	403	415	33.09	26.18
<b>Total</b>	<b>1218</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3: How many hours a week have you been active in sports?

No. of hours	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
0	19		1.71	
1	73	67	6.57	4.54
2	96	112	8.64	7.58
3	77	89	6.93	6.03
4	56	78	5.04	5.28
5	86	141	7.74	9.55
6	66	75	5.94	5.08
7	59	69	5.31	4.67
8	35	70	3.15	4.74
9	22	19	1.98	1.29
10	62	186	5.58	15.59
11	7	9	0.63	0.61
12	16	54	1.44	3.66
13	9	10	0.81	0.68
14	82	54	7.38	3.66
15	25	87	2.25	5.89
16	13	11	1.17	0.74
17	4	6	0.36	0.41
18	8	15	0.72	1.02
19	4	2	0.36	0.14
> than 20	292	323	26.28	20.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>1111</b>	<b>1477</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 4: How many hours a day have you on average watched TV during the holidays?

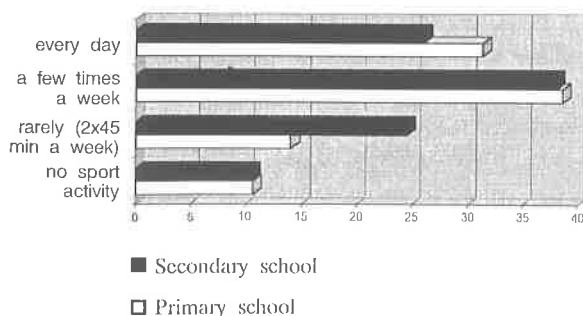
No. of hours	No. of answers		(%)	
	PP	SS	PP	SS
0	30		2.48	
1	217	424	17.95	28.46
2	302	441	24.98	29.60
3	263	269	21.75	18.05
4	133	156	11.00	10.47
5	126	101	10.42	6.78
6	30	42	2.48	2.82
7	23	15	1.90	1.01
8	14	7	1.16	0.47
9	9	1	0.74	0.07
10	14	18	1.16	1.21
11	5	1	0.41	0.07
12	15	5	1.24	0.34
> than 12	28	10	2.32	0.67
Total	1209	1490	100.0	100.0

directly used also during the holidays and free time (e.g. beach volleyball, Frisbee, inline skating, etc.). Schools in their turn should be supplied with the material means meant just for this purpose. Attention must be focused on the new trends in sport and especially in the field of summer sports. In this case an influence of foreign trends and mass-media is very distinctive.

From the answers to the questions about intensity and quantity of playing sports and from the answers about watching TV (Tables 2,3,4 and Chart 1) we can conclude that for these activities students spend more than 5 hours a day. As we expected they spend most of the time in front of TV.

Almost 4 hours of watching TV per day is the best example of the way our children

Chart 1: Frequency of sport activity



spend their free time. Apparently the TV has drastically changed our way of living and has become the most important factor responsible for the passive style of spending time by young people. There is no doubt that we are far away from the world principles which say that one hour of watching TV per day is completely enough, especially for the young. In many cases watching TV brings profits for the students - learning foreign languages, general orientation in current matters, education, etc. Most of the time, especially in the case of exaggeration, TV can be harmful. Recently, especially in the USA, a new kind of TV set with a built-in timer has been introduced. The timer automatically switches the TV set off after a certain time.

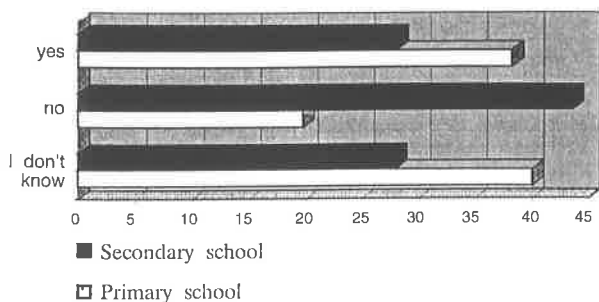
During the holidays the length of time spent in playing sports (different physical activities) amounts to one or two hours a day. Considering the status of the motor and morphological characteristics among children it would be necessary to at least double this time, and to demand the high quality that sport offers. According to the already known results we can expect that together with too short a time spent on sport the quality of dealing with sport activities is also questionable. The point is, what does the child do, who leads the process, what program is realized, etc.

The dissonance between the time spent watching TV and participating in sport activities is absurd. It leads to a life style that has already caused some disturbances in young people's development. It is possible to predict that the results of a passive way of living will still be more noticeable after the end of schooling. It is necessary to ask key

Table 5: Should sport activities be professionally organized and led by school also during the holidays?

	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
I do not know	515	441	40.84	27.81
No	254	697	20.14	43.95
Yes	492	448	39.02	28.25
Total	1261	1586	100.0	100.0

Chart 2: Sport activities organized by school(%)



questions: where will the above children's life style lead to and what are the real chances of the principle: sport as an element of life's quality with which we are lately occupied both in professional and political circles.

Almost 40% of primary school students, but only less than 30% of secondary school students gave a positive answer to the question whether school should provide organized sport activities during the summer holidays (Table 5, Chart 2).

If such an activity is organized, students expect it to be led by physical education teachers and trainers, whereas some of the students see parents in this role as well (Table 6, Chart 3).

Chart 3: Leaders of sport activities %

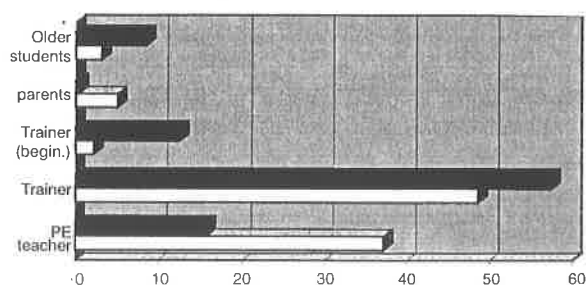


Table 6: If you take part in an organized sport activity who should lead it?

	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
physical education teacher	480	251	37.91	15.82
trainer	626	920	49.45	57.97
trainer beginner	29	200	2.29	12.60
parents	64	6	5.06	0.38
older students	40	135	3.16	8.51
others	27	75	2.13	4.73
Total	1266	1587	100.0	100.0

Most pupils would like to join swimming and tennis classes, training in a gymnasium and excursions to the mountains. They are also interested in summer camps and camping. It is interesting that about 20% of boys and girls choose a sport activity connected with learning a foreign language (Table 7).

Table 7: If school organises sport activities which activities would you like to take part in?

	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
<b>a) Summer camps</b>				
No	857	1037	68.67	65.10
Yes	391	556	31.33	34.90
Total	1248	1593	100.0	100.0
<b>b) Classes (in swimming, tennis)</b>				
No	660	1027	52.88	64.47
Yes	588	566	47.12	35.53
Total	1248	1593	100.0	100.0
<b>c) Training in the school gymnasium</b>				
No	936	1162	75.00	72.94
Yes	312	431	25.00	27.06
Total	1248	1593	100.0	100.0
<b>d) Camping</b>				
No	842	905	67.41	56.81
Yes	407	688	32.59	43.19
Total	1249	1593	100.0	100.0
<b>e) Mountaineering, Excursions</b>				
No	837	1113	67.01	69.87
Yes	412	480	32.99	30.13
Total	1249	1593	100.0	100.0
<b>f) Sports camp connected with foreign language classes</b>				
No	1010	1259	80.86	79.03
Yes	239	334	19.14	20.97
Total	1249	1593	100.0	100.0

The data convince us that young people's attitude towards sport activities during holidays is not met with any proper offers from the school's and parents' side. Summer break does not allow improvisation. On the contrary, it requires a serious and systematic approach that would enable our children to spend their free time in a higher quality way.

What is the life style of young people we can conclude from the answers in which students gave information about what time they went to sleep and when they got up (Tables 8, 9 and Charts 4, 5).

Table 8: What time did you usually go to sleep during the holidays?

Time	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
18	2	1	0.16	0.06
19	2	1	0.16	0.06
20	36	2	2.83	0.13
21	139	5	10.94	0.31
22	425	144	33.44	9.06
23	388	456	30.53	28.68
24	279	981	21.95	61.70
Total	1271	1590	100.0	100.0

Chart 4: Bed time (%)

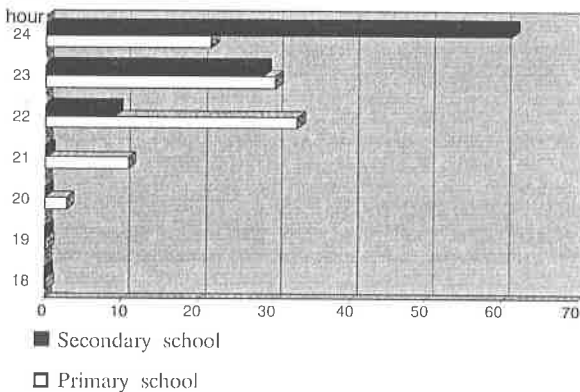
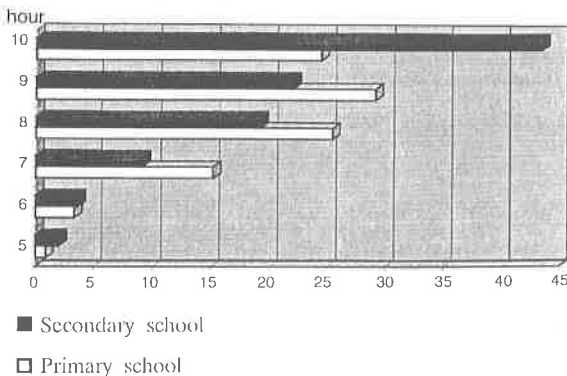


Table 9: What time did you usually get up during the holidays?

Time	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
5	11	32	0.88	2.02
6	43	57	3.45	3.59
7	195	145	15.63	9.13
8	327	307	26.20	19.33
9	357	352	28.61	22.17
10	315	695	25.24	43.77
Total	1248	1588	100.0	100.0

Chart 5: Getting up (%)



This graphic illustration shows us a shocking situation (especially at the class level). More than a half of primary school students goes for their nights rest between 10 and 11 p.m. Only about 14% of children go to sleep before 9 p.m. Secondary school students go to bed even later, mostly after midnight.

The morning wake up, which is better to name a noon wake up, is a straight reflection of the above. Most primary school children get up after 9 a.m. and the youth gets up about 10 a.m. That is about 5 hours after sunrise. Therefore it does not seem exaggerated to say that during the holidays young people are left on their own and that the family upbringing is almost totally neglected.

The results of the above situation are also visible in the answers about health status (Tables 10, 11).

Table 10: Did you get injured during the holidays?

injury	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
No	1091	1405	86.86	88.64
Yes	165	180	13.14	11.36
Total	1256	1585	100.0	100.0

Table 11: How many times did you visit the doctor during the holidays?

No. of visits	No. of answers		(%)	
	PS	SS	PS	SS
0	899	1220	71.18	76.97
1	187	190	14.81	11.99
2	75	97	5.94	6.12
3	41	36	3.25	2.27
4	17	10	1.35	0.63
5	17	7	1.35	0.44
6	8	3	0.63	0.19
7	3	2	0.24	0.13
8	1	2	0.08	0.13
9	1	1	0.08	0.06
10	7	9	0.55	0.57
12	2	2	0.16	0.13
14	1		0.08	
15	3	1	0.24	0.06
18		3		0.19
20	1	2	0.08	0.13
Total	1263	1585	100.0	100.0

Because of health problems the students had to see the doctor at least once during the holidays. More than 13 % of pupils in primary schools and more than 11% of pupils in secondary schools suffered an injury caused by different reasons.

## Conclusion

The data about the life style of young people warn us that the systems of education, health care, sport, family, tourism and others are indifferent to the students' active way of living during the holidays. The consequences for the development are more than alarming, and a detailed analysis would probably reveal many other mistakes in the process of upbringing.

It is necessary in the future, also from a pedagogic point of view, to take better care of children's holidays, and to take some planned and systematic steps towards a better tomorrow of the young ones also in the field of education.

The basic question or dilemma that should be considered is: would it not be more reasonable to shorten the holidays slightly and to increase the number of free days during the school year, e.g. longer winter holidays. There is another solution as well which is to appropriately guide the children

during their free time in the summer vacations. It should be necessarily supported by actual cuts in taxes and by help with establishing new institutions which in the social interest and in a professional way would organize and lead the young people's leisure time. Considering the interest and wishes of children the school will have to reorganize itself and offer appropriate contents and forms of upbringing and education in the summer time as well. It is a shame that gymnasiums that were built mostly thanks to donations stay empty for almost two months a year (July and August).

The young person's negative attitude to the useful, active and healthy way of spending his/her free time will strongly affect his/her style of life in adulthood. The negative approach to the active use of free time, as a result of a personal system of values that was created in youth, may be a bad example and influence on one's offspring. Therefore one of the main roles of the sport education process (also during the holidays) is to encourage children to take part in sport activities. They have to be convinced that sport can make life more colourful and richer and that it is sport that can neutralize the negative results of the present day style of living. At the end we can try to paraphrase a well-known slogan: not **Back to nature** but **Forward to nature**.

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