**TRANSFORMATION OR REPRODUCTION? TRENDS WITH AGE IN GENDER AND CLASS DIVISIONS IN YOUNG SINGLE ADULTS’ USES OF FREE TIME IN SOUTH AND EAST MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES SINCE ‘THE EVENTS OF 2011’\***

**Ken Roberts**

**University of Liverpool,**

**Siyka Kovacheva**

**University of Plovdiv,**

**and**

**Stanimir Kabaivanov**

**University of Plovdiv**

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**Abstract**

This paper urges resetting research into youth and leisure to match recent extensions of the life stage. It also proposes that the special mission of sociology within studies of youth and leisure should be to focus on ‘Big Leisure’, all of it, rather than a series of ‘little leisures’. These proposals are applied in analysing the findings from surveys of nationally representative samples totalling approximately 2000 15-29 year olds in each of five South and East Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). The results show gender differences in uses of free time widening, and differences by social class origins weakening but remaining influential throughout the extended youth life stage, while the influence on leisure of levels of educational attainment and labour force experience assist the reproduction of existing social class formations. It is argued that the failure of the ‘Arab Spring’ to trigger wider social and economic transformations in the region is mirrored in young people’s uses of leisure which are helping to perpetuate existing divisions, thereby tending to stabilise rather than undermine the region’s Arab-Islamic version of modernity.

**Keywords:** Arab, free time, gender, leisure, leisure careers, social class, youth.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Leisure during the youth life stage**

Studies of youth and leisure need a new paradigm: a new set of questions and methods for their investigation. The field needs a thorough decoupling from the early-20th century bio-psychology of adolescence (see Hall, 1904) and its later neo-Freudian elaborations (for example, Erikson, 1968). The field also needs releasing from a 20th century pre-occupation with ‘at risk’ youth. The risks have been updated from delinquency through alcohol, tobacco, drugs, unsafe sex, online grooming and bullying, and body image neuroses, but a desire to shift youth from ‘unhealthy’ to ‘wholesome’ uses of free time has remained pivotal (as, for example, in Witt and Crompton, 1998). A new paradigm is needed because during and since the closing decades of the 20th century there has been a worldwide lengthening of the youth life stage. Young people have been spending more years in education. It has taken even longer for them to obtain jobs with the salaries and security that will support an adult life. There have been upward movements in the typical ages of first marriages and parenthood. The South and East Mediterranean countries which feature in the following passages have not been exceptions to these trends.

Other ‘youth and…’ research fields have adjusted. Instead of studying one-step education-to-work transitions, youth researchers have been identifying more complex sequences of steps through upper secondary and tertiary education, training, spells of unemployment, and in part-time, temporary or otherwise stop-gap jobs. Rather than young couples each leaving their parents’ homes, marrying and starting life in a new family home, all within a single day as an outcome of their first serious relationship, researchers have needed to engage with sequences of sexually intimate and romantic relationships and also, in some countries, housing careers out of parental homes followed by sequences of stays in rented accommodation, solo or sharing. Youth and leisure researchers need to engage with careers in uses of free time as, with increasing age, young people and young adults must find new age appropriate places to go and things to do (Hendry, 1983; Hendry et al, 1993, 2002). This applies to how and exactly where young people just ‘hang about’ in town centres and in their neighbourhoods (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). Up to now youth careers in participant sport have been examined with especially detailed and sustained attention (for example, see Birchwood et al, 2008; Haycock and Smith, 2014; Parry, 2015; Roberts et al, 1991; Smith et al, 2015). There has been a related stream of research into how leisure tastes and skills acquired during childhood and youth may (or may not) be continued into and throughout adulthood (Bennett, 2006, 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson, 2012; Hodkinson, 2011; McGuire et al, 1987; Nagel, 2010; Scott and Willits, 1989).

However, all the above pioneering studies have dealt with just one of the ‘little leisures’. This is not a criticism of specialisation, but the special mission of sociology in youth and leisure research must be to focus on ‘Big Leisure’ (see Roberts, 2011), and the research reported here is the first to cover such a wide youth age range (15-29) and to attempt to scan the whole of leisure. We find that the ‘little leisures’ of the subjects in this research (playing sport, going to the cinema, using libraries, attending festivals and other music events, going to the theatre, and visiting tearooms and cafes, for example) all had specific socio-demographic profiles of participants and trends with age. Leisure studies (plural) has a metaphorical warehouse in which all mixes of genders, sexual orientations, social classes and age groups, examples of resistance and conformity, change and continuity, can be found, but these are of minimal if any macro-societal significance. They tell us nothing about wider social trends. Big Leisure (singular, all of it) is different. Big Leisure is shaped by its surrounding economy, education, political order and family practices. Within leisure studies, the sociology of leisure’s special remit must be to address Big Leisure and discover whatever this can tell us about wider social changes and continuities.

Here we focus on gender and class differences and how these changed or stayed constant during the extended youth life stage in South and East Mediterranean countries in the years following the tumultuous events of 2011 known as the Arab Spring. In early youth, class and gender differences in uses of free time will be products childhood family, neighbourhood and educational cultures. Then, during youth, family controls weaken, young people acquire agency and encounter a widening range of ways in which they can use their discretionary time and money. Their life chances depend increasingly on their own achievements in education and the labour market. Males and females may draw together or pull apart in their uses of free time. Class differences may widen or narrow, and/or may be reconstructed in the process of achieved positions replacing ascribed statuses in placing individuals within their societies’ systems of social stratification. The social structures of all Arab-majority Mediterranean countries have been built on deep, thorough and (up to now) stable class and gender divisions. Beneath tiny, powerful business, political and military elites there have been middle classes of professionals, administrators and managers in the public sectors, and similar salaried employees alongside proprietors of large and small private businesses. The rest of the people have shared only exclusion from middle class privileges in education, employment, housing and, of course, free time options. Social class divisions have been cross-cut by gender divisions in which the public sphere has been male territory while women have been confined to the private spheres of homes and families. Most exceptions have been within the middle class, thus accentuating this class’s distinction. In what follows we are interested in differences in uses of free time among the countries’ young people, and how these differences have changed, or remained as before, during their extended life stage transitions since ‘the events of 2011’.

**Evidence**

This is from interview surveys in 2015-16 among nationally representative samples of 15-29 year olds in each of five South and East Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). The fieldwork was supervised by local academic partners and conducted by survey organisations with experience of identifying nationally representative samples in their respective countries. The initial samples were always households, in which all residents aged 15-29 were interviewed. Fieldworkers went out in pairs and the interviews were always conducted by a same-sex interviewer. There was complementary qualitative fieldwork in three contrasting locations in each of the five countries (see Roberts et al, 2018c), but the following analysis uses data solely from the quantitative surveys.

The research was planned in the immediate aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 when there was international interest in the conditions, grievances and aspirations of the region’s youth, and the interviews covered all aspects of respondents’ lives – their childhood families, education, employment and unemployment, profiles of religious and political orientations and activities, plus uses of free time for which respondents were asked about their frequency of participation in 16 different out-of-home leisure activities. Answers were recorded on a six-point scale with a range from never to every day. Throughout the following analysis we use ‘at least once a week’ as the cut-off for distinguishing regular participants from others, and we compare the mean number of activities practised per week by different socio-demographic groups. Respondents were also asked to estimate the time that they spent each day watching television and online. We asked which respondents belonged to from a list of seven types of community associations. Here we use ‘at least one’ to compare the engagement of different socio-demographic groups. We also asked whether, and if so how often, respondents attended a mosque, or less frequently a church, synagogue or another place of worship. Answers were recorded on a six-point scale, like involvement in other out-of-home free time activities, and again we use ‘at least once a week’ to separate regular attenders from others. Public religious practice, and participation in community associations, are uses of free time through which individuals can express and develop affinities with groups wider than their friends, families and neighbours.

We restrict our analysis to single respondents having shown elsewhere that marriage was associated with a general reduction in out-of-home free time activities by men and women (Roberts et al, 2018a). Thus our comparisons between participation rates in different age groups (15-19, 20-24 and 25-29) are assumed to be age effects, features of normal (in the countries) age-related changes in uses of free time among unmarried youth and young adults, rather than consequences of changes in family circumstances.

Throughout our analysis we divide respondents into age groups and by gender, and also by ‘social class’ origins, indicated most appropriately for our purposes by fathers’ education. Occupation proves a less precise indicator in countries where around a third of all male employment is self-employment which can mean anything from subsistence farming to a substantial enterprise. Father’s education was a good predictor of whether the fathers held (or had held if subsequently retired) ‘salariat’ (non-manual) positions. It is also likely to be a better indicator than occupations of a household’s cultural character. Fathers’ and mother’s education were positively inter-related, but fathers were the better educated: 10 percent of fathers against six percent of respondents’ mothers had been to university. Most mothers had ‘housewife’ as their sole occupation. As we had expected, fathers’ education predicted their children’s educational attainments and thereby indirectly, but also directly, their subsequent employment (Kovacheva et al, 2018a; Roberts et al, 2018b). We are not seeking to explain gender, age or social class differences in uses of free time, but to test whether differences between socio-demographic groups formed by age 15-19 remained unchanged throughout the 20-29 age range, or whether the genders and social classes pulled apart or became more similar in their uses of free time. These are our indicators of whether the Arab Spring had dislocated former social patterns, whether these were being reproduced or reconstituted. For this we also test whether respondents’ post-16 experiences had independent effects on their free time uses. For this purpose we group just the 25-29 age group into those with and without higher education qualifications, and also by their labour force positions. Here we treat males and females differently. Fifty-five percent of all young adult women in our surveys had never entered the labour market after leaving education, and this ‘inactive group’ among the 25-29 year olds are separated from those who were at least seeking jobs. Males are grouped according to the quality of their employment. Those with ‘salariat’ jobs (with written contracts of indefinite duration), or who were in informal jobs or self-employed with incomes above the lowest quartiles in their countries, are separated from a precariat of lower-paid employees, those who were currently unemployed, and others who had become long-term inactive in the labour market (see Roberts et al, 2018b).

We expected differences in uses of free time by our youngest (15-19 year old) respondents to follow ascribed gender and social class positions. Then, during youth, we anticipated the influence of social class origins weakening as a result of social mobility (upward and downward) between social classes, and that achieved statuses in education and the labour market would replace class origins as the more powerful sources of class differences. In the process, it was possible that our research would record radical, transformative changes in which gender and social class differences widened or narrowed, and entirely new differences in uses of free time eroded older and created new socio-cultural formations. During and immediately following the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 it appeared that the region might be following a trajectory comparable to the communist bloc before, during and after ‘the events of 1989’ in East-Central Europe (see Pilkington, 1994). By the time that our surveys were underway in 2015 and 2016 we knew that the Arab Spring has not led to sweeping political or economic changes except in the countries that could not be included in the research (Libya and Syria) due to the ongoing civil wars (see Amour, 2018). However, it was possible that experience of the events of 2011 had changed the region’s youth in ways that would unsettle and eventually transform the countries, and focusing on Big Leisure enables us to see whether what seemed ‘possible’ in 2011 subsequently became ‘probable’.

**FINDINGS**

**Gender**

Our respondents’ most common form of out-of-home leisure was simply ‘going out with friends’. ‘Visiting cafes or tea rooms’ was in second place. It was followed by ‘playing sport’ by males. All other activities (and sport among females) had much lower (single digit) participation rates. When a group’s mean score in Table I is above 2.0 this typically means that the respondents were going out with friends, meeting them in cafes or tea rooms at least once a week, and doing something in addition (attending a music event, the cinema, theatre or library, for example).

**Table I**

**Age, gender and participation in free time activities**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **15-19** | **20-24** | **25-29** |  | **15-19** | **20-24** | **25-29** |
| **Take part at least once a week. Mean number of out-of-home free time activities** | 2.6 | 2.7 | 2.4 |  | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.0 |
| **Average minutes per day** **watching television** | 151 | 151 | 146 |  | 175 | 182 | 189 |
| **Average minutes per day** **online** | 204 | 216 | 210 |  | 204 | 234 | 240 |
| N = | 1518 | 1452 | 1043 |  | 1208 | 926 | 628 |

Males were clearly the more active in out-of-home leisure and this applied in all age groups. Their mean score at age 15-19 was 2.6 against 1.6 for the young women whose participation rate then fell steadily to 1.0 among 25-29 year olds and the male lead rose from 1.0 to 1.4. There were no Big Leisure signs in out-of-home activities of a trend towards genderlessness. During youth these divisions actually widened. Males were clearly ahead at age 15-19 and pulled further ahead as they moved towards adulthood. This was happening prior to marriage and parenthood.

The young women were compensating with greater screen time. At age 15-19 they were watching television for an average of 175 minutes per day against the males’ 151 minutes. By age 25-29 the female lead in television time had increased from 24 to 43 minutes per day (see Table I). There was no difference in time spent online by males and females at age 15-19 but by age 25-29 the young women were averaging 240 minutes on a typical day against 210 minutes by the males. The young women were spending more time at home. The typical single male was spending six hours while a typical single female was spending seven hours per day watching a screen, and among both sexes online time exceeded television time.

**Table II**

**Age, gender and participation in associations**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **15-19**  **%** | **20-24**  **%** | **25-29**  **%** |  | **15-19**  **%** | **20-24**  **%** | **25-29**  **%** |
| **Percentages who belonged to an association** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Cultural association | 18 | 20 | 15 |  | 20 | 22 | 16 |
| Humanitarian association/charity | 21 | 23 | 18 |  | 22 | 24 | 19 |
| Neighbourhood association | 15 | 19 | 14 |  | 10 | 15 | 8 |
| Women’s association | 9 | 12 | 6 |  | 13 | 19 | 15 |
| Union | 11 | 15 | 12 |  | 10 | 13 | 10 |
| Informal group seeking to provide community services | 14 | 17 | 12 |  | 12 | 14 | 8 |
| Faith-based political group | 8 | 11 | 7 |  | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| **At least one of the above** | 28 | 29 | 25 |  | 27 | 31 | 27 |
| **Mosque/church attendance: at least once a week** | 35 | 41 | 38 |  | 15 | 16 | 11 |
| **N =** | 1518 | 1452 | 1043 |  | 1208 | 926 | 628 |

In contrast, there was no difference in the likelihood of the sexes joining community associations. Nor was there any trend with age (see Table II). All the participation rates in Table II show between 25 percent and 31percent of the gender and age groups belonging to at least one association. Moreover, the young men and women were joining the same types of associations. The highest membership rates were in charities and humanitarian associations, followed by cultural, neighbourhood and community service groups. Other associations – student and worker unions, faith groups and associations addressing women’s and gender issues had lower membership rates. Moslems are expected to support charities with time or money, and just over a quarter of our respondents were complying. They were supporting Palestinians, refugees, the local poor, the disabled, ex-prisoners, orphans and various others. Our finding that males and females had similar rates of membership did not necessarily mean that they were working together. Women would typically work with groups of women, dealing with female clients, children and families. Males were more likely to engage with male clients.

With public religious participation males exhibited an exaggeration of their lead in out-of-home leisure activities. Among young people and young adults, according to our evidence, the region’s mosques have overwhelmingly male congregations. Males led by 35 percent to 15 percent among 15-19 year olds and by 38 percent to 11 percent among respondents aged 25-29 in terms of ‘at least once a week’ attendance. Here the sexes were always apart, and were growing further apart with age. A point to note here is that public religious participation was only weakly related to measurements of private religiosity (see Roberts et al, 2018d). Mosque attenders were not ultra-devout. They would pray and possibly listen to a preacher, but mosques were basically places where male (and to a lesser extent female) relatives, neighbours and acquaintances could congregate – a respectable alternative to the street or even a tea room or coffee shop.

Males’ uses of free time remained remarkably stable from age 15 to 29. Throughout, on average, they took part in between 2.4 and 2.7 different out-of-home leisure activities in a typical week. Time spent watching television was always between 146 and 151 minutes on a typical day, and online time was always between 204 and 216 minutes. Association memberships varied only between 25 percent and 29 percent, and the percentages visiting a place of religious worship at least weekly fluctuated only between 35 percent and 41 percent. Young women’s uses of free time did change. There were clear upward or downward trends in most ways in which this time could be used. The average number of out-of-home leisure activities undertaken per week fell steadily from 1.6 to 1.0. Television viewing increased from 175 to 189 minutes per day, and online time from 204 to 240 minutes. The percentages attending a place of religious worship at least weekly fell from 15 percent and 16 percent to 11 percent among the 25-29 year olds. However, between 27 percent and 31 percent throughout belonged to at least one community association. When one sex was ahead at age 15-19, it was further ahead at age 25-29. In terms of overall uses of free time, during the extended youth life stage in the region, the sexes were always apart in most activities, and the trend with age was for uses of free time to become more, not less, gendered

**Social class origins**

Our expectation was that differences by social class origins (indicated by fathers’ education) would be widest among our youngest respondents, the 15-19 year olds, then diminish as achieved statuses became more efficacious. An earlier analysis of evidence from Lebanon had shown that upwardly mobile youth tended to adopt the leisure practices and patterns of their likely classes of destination, and likewise among the downwardly mobile (Roberts and Kovacheva, 2016). We expected this finding to be repeated with fuller evidence from across all five of our research countries. We expected the efficacy of social class origins to diminish among males and females even though only a minority of the latter were entering the labour forces in their countries. Our expectation was based on females being slightly more likely than males to enter and graduate from higher education (30 percent and 28 percent), and higher education graduates were unlike other females in that they typically sought (but did not necessarily obtain) employment (Kovacheva et al, 2018a).

Throughout the following analysis we give mini-max figures – the differences in the rates of participation and time spent between the lowest scoring and highest scoring fathers’ education groups. In some cases (out-of-home leisure activities and membership of associations), respondents from the highest social classes had the highest participation rates, whereas the reverse applied in time spent watching television and public religious participation.

**Table III**

**Age, gender, fathers’ education and participation in free time activities**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **15-19** | **20-24** | **25-29** |  | **15-19** | **20-24** | **25-29** |
| **Take part at least once a week. Mean number of leisure activities** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 2.2 | 2.5 | 2.3 |  | 1.2 | 1.0 | 0.8 |
| Secondary | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.5 |  | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.1 |
| Higher | 2.8 | 3.0 | 3.1 |  | 2.1 | 1.8 | 1.9 |
| **Average minutes per day** **watching television** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 167 | 161 | 150 |  | 196 | 197 | 196 |
| Secondary | 141 | 143 | 141 |  | 164 | 170 | 184 |
| Higher | 132 | 129 | 139 |  | 152 | 145 | 172 |
| **Average minutes per day** **online** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 221 | 199 | 214 |  | 218 | 238 | 243 |
| Secondary | 197 | 227 | 207 |  | 197 | 244 | 237 |
| Higher | 196 | 233 | 221 |  | 204 | 199 | 241 |
| N = | 1518 | 1452 | 1043 |  | 1208 | 926 | 628 |

Our expectation of diminishing differences with age was confounded in the numbers of out-of-home leisure activities in which our respondents were involved. Among 15-19 year old males the mini-max gap was 0.7 and it was slightly higher, 0.8, among the 25-29 year olds. Among females the gap increased from 0.9 to 1.1 activities. The effects of social class origins were persistent among both males and females (Table III).

It was young people with the least educated fathers who spent the most time watching television, and here the mini-max class gap did close with age. It closed from an average of 35 minutes per day to 11 minutes among males, and from 44 to 24 minutes among the females. The mini-max gap in time spent online also narrowed from 25 to 14 minutes per day among males, and from 21 to just 6 minutes among the females (Table III).

Membership of community associations was most common among respondents with the most highly educated fathers. Among males the mini-max gap – the difference between the percentages who belonged to at least one association – declined from 21 percent among 15-19 year olds to just 6 percent among those aged 25-29. In contrast, among females the gap remained stable at 24 percent (see Table IV). The closure of the male gap was due to the decline in memberships among those with the best educated fathers. This did not happen among females, possibly because most stayed out of their countries’ paid workforces whereas males were spending time in or looking for paid jobs.

With public religious participation it was respondents with the least educated fathers who were most likely to participate, and as with participation in out-of-home leisure activities, the mini-max gaps did not close with age: 6 percent among 15-19 year old males and 11 percent among 25-29 year olds, and 4 percent among females in both age groups (see Table IV).

**Table IV**

**Age, gender, fathers’ education and participation in associations**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **15-19**  **%** | **20-24**  **%** | **25-29**  **%** |  | **15-19**  **%** | **20-24**  **%** | **25-29**  **%** |
| **Percentages who belonged to at least one association** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fathers’ education, primary of less | 20 | 26 | 23 |  | 19 | 26 | 20 |
| Middle of full secondary education | 32 | 33 | 26 |  | 30 | 34 | 29 |
| Higher | 41 | 36 | 29 |  | 43 | 49 | 44 |
| **Mosque/church attendance: at least once a week** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fathers’ education, primary of less | 35 | 41 | 41 |  | 13 | 16 | 12 |
| Middle of full secondary education | 37 | 41 | 32 |  | 17 | 17 | 8 |
| Higher | 31 | 41 | 30 |  | 14 | 12 | 16 |
| **N =** | 1518 | 1452 | 1043 |  | 1208 | 926 | 628 |

Overall, therefore, we find that some differences in uses of free time by social class origins did decline between age 15-19 and 25-29, but there were major exceptions, namely involvement in out-of-home leisure activities and public religious participation by both sexes, and association memberships among the young women.

**Higher education**

It seemed realistic to anticipate higher education acting as a transformative crucible among the region’s youth. Over a quarter of the region’s young men and women were becoming university graduates. It seemed likely, or at least possible, that among students and graduates socio-cultural gender differences would be eroded, and that a new cleavage would be formed between graduates and the rest of their age group, with graduates poised to become the vanguard of a transformative generation. In the event, our findings have not endorsed such expectations.

This section and the one that follows deal solely with respondents aged 25-29, by when they had nearly all completed full-time education. Restricting analysis to this age group, separating males and females, then dividing each into graduates and others, creates a small N problem among those with fathers who were higher education graduates. This is because only 10 percent of all fathers had achieved this level of education. The percentages for this group of university educated respondents are best ignored. Respondents’ own levels of education (and to a lesser extent their subsequent employment, if any), were related to their fathers’ education, so we will claim to have identified a higher education effect on uses of free time only if there were differences between graduates and other respondents overall and with fathers’ education controlled.

**Table V**

**Higher education and uses of free time, 25-29 year olds**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Higher education**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |  | **Higher education**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |
| **Take part at least once a week.** **Mean number of activities** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 2.2 | 2.2 |  | 0.9 | 0.9 |
| Secondary | 2.6 | 2.3 |  | 1.4 | 0.9 |
| Higher | 2.9 | 3.4 |  | 1.6 | 2.6 |
| All | 2.5 | 2.3 |  | 1.2 | 1.0 |
| **Average minutes per day** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Watching television** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 126 | 156 |  | 160 | 208 |
| Secondary | 127 | 143 |  | 144 | 205 |
| Higher | 126 | 137 |  | 171 | 172 |
| All | 126 | 151 |  | 156 | 204 |
| **Internet** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 233 | 227 |  | 253 | 252 |
| Secondary | 220 | 221 |  | 252 | 242 |
| Higher | 229 | 276 |  | 232 | 336 |
| All | 225 | 226 |  | 249 | 253 |
| **N** | 196 | 642 |  | 163 | 342 |

Male and female higher education graduates took part in more out-of-home leisure activities than other respondents, but this was not a higher education effect. It fails to appear consistently among both males and females with fathers’ levels of education controlled. In contrast, there was a substantial higher education effect on time spent watching television – graduates watched for far fewer minutes per day than other respondents. However, there was no higher education effect on time spent online (see Table V).

There was a higher education effect among males and females which boosted the percentages who belonged to community associations, especially among the young women. In contrast, higher education was making no overall difference to the likelihood of respondents attending a place of religious worship at least once a week. However, among male graduates with the least educated fathers there was an intriguing huge boost from 32 percent to 55 percent in regular mosque attendance (Table VI).

**Table VI**

**Higher education and uses of free time, 25-29 year olds**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Higher education**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |  | **Higher education**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |
| **Community politics: belongs to at least one association** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 27 | 21 |  | 29 | 19 |
| Secondary | 27 | 25 |  | 37 | 30 |
| Higher | 27 | 35 |  | 54 | 57 |
| All | 27 | 23 |  | 36 | 22 |
| **Mosque/church attendance: at least once a week** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 55 | 32 |  | 3 | 3 |
| Secondary | 25 | 24 |  | 10 | 8 |
| Higher | 16 | 38 |  | 7 | 22 |
| All | 28 | 30 |  | 9 | 12 |
| **N =** | 196 | 642 |  | 163 | 342 |

Overall, there were often crude differences in the participation rates of graduates and other respondents, but most of the differences prove spurious, due to the fathers’ levels of education, and therefore are examples of uses of free time being transmitted from generation to generation. The main exceptions, where there were clear higher education effects, were in reducing television viewing by males and females, and a substantial boost to young women’s likelihood of joining one or more community associations. These findings seem insufficient to treat higher education as the incubator of a socio-cultural change vanguard.

**Labour force participation**

Males and females are divided differently here. As explained above, males are split into those with decent jobs (by standards in their own countries), and a larger number who were earning very low incomes from self-employment or informal jobs, unemployed at the time of our surveys or completely inactive in the labour market. Females are divided into those who were at least active in the labour market, and those who had left education and never looked for jobs or, in all probability, even contemplated employment.

**Table VII**

**Labour force positions and uses of free time, 25-29 year olds**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Business or sub-business, salariat or sub-salariat, informals**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |  | **Any class in labour force**  **%** | **Inactive**  **%** |
| **Take part at least once a week: mean number of free time activities** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 2.3 | 2.1 |  | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| Secondary | 2.2 | 2.7 |  | 2.3 | 3.1 |
| Higher | 2.9 | 2.5 |  | 2.9 | 2.5 |
| All | 2.3 | 2.3 |  | 2.3 | 2.4 |
| **Average minutes per day** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Watching television** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 164 | 209 |  | 175 | 222 |
| Secondary | 149 | 216 |  | 150 | 238 |
| Higher | 147 | 207 |  | 182 | 185 |
| All | 155 | 211 |  | 166 | 225 |
| **Internet** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 218 | 262 |  | 245 | 252 |
| Secondary | 249 | 263 |  | 236 | 213 |
| Higher | 219 | 237 |  | 212 | 260 |
| All | 221 | 241 |  | 217 | 239 |
| **N =** | 457 | 424 |  | 674 | 207 |

Overall, and with social origins controlled, the higher labour force achievers in both sexes were spending less time watching television, and males (but not females) were also spending less time online (Table VII). Employment was squeezing screen time, but not the propensity to join community associations (Table VIII). Likewise, labour force status was making no difference to participation in out-of-home leisure activities or public religious participation except among males with the least educated fathers who, atypically for males from such family backgrounds, and possibly their wider families and neighbourhood or village communities, had graduated from higher education (see Table VI) and/or obtained decent jobs (Table VIII). It appeared that such upwardly mobile young men were retaining contact with childhood ‘roots’ through mosque attendance which, as explained above, had a social as well as a religious dimension.

**Table VIII**

**Labour force positions and uses of free time, 25-29 year olds**

**Males Females**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Business or sub-business, salariat or sub-salariat, informals**  **%** | **Other**  **%** |  | **Any class in labour force**  **%** | **Inactive**  **%** |
| **Community politics: belongs to at least one association** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 29 | 17 |  | 24 | 19 |
| Secondary | 28 | 24 |  | 26 | 24 |
| Higher | 38 | 14 |  | 33 | 15 |
| All | 29 | 19 |  | 25 | 20 |
| **Attends mosque/church at least once a week** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Father’s education: primary school or less | 47 | 36 |  | 11 | 11 |
| Secondary | 33 | 31 |  | 9 | 4 |
| Higher | 8 | 7 |  | 0 | 6 |
| All | 30 | 34 |  | 9 | 9 |
| **N =** | 457 | 424 |  | 674 | 207 |

**DISCUSSION**

When we began presenting our findings we noted that single males’ uses of free time remained remarkably constant from late-teens to late-20s. Single women were different. Their uses of free time did change. They curtailed ‘going out’ and spent more time with the media. Boys and girls, brothers and sisters, were growing up in the same families, and gender differences in education had been eliminated. Then after finishing education the sexes’ lives diverged. Males sought (and most obtained) jobs. Young women were far less likely to seek employment (see Kovacheva et al, 2018a). They stayed at home, and while still single their uses of free time changed in ways that seemed to anticipate their futures as wives and mothers.

We would not expect the findings from our research to be replicated in Europe or North America. Change drivers that operate during youth in the Global North are absent in South and East Mediterranean countries where public romantic, and any sexually intimate, relationships between young singles are neither expected nor acceptable. This makes it impossible for single males’ free time behaviour to change from mixing with same-sex peers to mixed crowds then to couples, with a consequential merging of the sexes’ uses of free time. Marriages are always arranged through families. Most couples have to marry in the hope that love or at least mutual respect will follow (see Kovacheva et al, 2018b).

Alcohol is another change driver that is absent in the South and East Mediterranean. The sale of alcohol was not prohibited in any of our research countries, but it was not usually available outside the places (hotels and restaurants) used by foreigners who were in the countries for business or leisure. This was depriving young males of the ability to exchange teenage ways of passing free time with a more varied and larger number of adult practices.

A third set of absent change drivers has been the expansion of jobs in manufacturing that occurred when the Global North industrialised, and the expansion of non-manual, especially management and professional-grade, jobs that triggered upsurges in absolute upward social mobility from the mid-20th century, and diminished class differences in uses of free time by young people whose adult destinations remained uncertain (Roberts and Parsell, 1994).

**Table IX**

**Mini-max gaps**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Out of home leisure activities** | **Watching television** | **Online** | **Community associations** | **Public religious participation** |
| Gender, 15-19\* | +1.0 | -24 | 0 | +1 | +20 |
| Gender 25-29\* | +1.4 | -43 | -30 | -2 | +27 |
| Fathers’ education 15-19, males\*\* | +0.7 | -35 | -25 | +21 | -6 |
| Fathers’ education 25-29, males\*\* | +0.8 | -11 | -14 | +6 | -11 |
| Fathers’ education 15-19, females\*\* | +0.9 | -29 | -21 | +24 | -4 |
| Fathers’ education 25-29, females\*\* | +1.1 | -14 | -6 | +24 | -4 |
| Respondents’ higher education, 25-29, males\*\* | +0.2 | -25 | -1 | +4 | -2 |
| Respondents’ higher education, 25-29, females\*\* | +0.2 | -48 | -4 | +14 | -3 |
| Respondents’ labour force positions, 25-29, males\*\*\* | 0 | -56 | -20 | +10 | -4 |
| Respondents’ labour force positions, 25-29, females\*\*\* | -0.1 | -59 | -22 | +5 | 0 |

\*Males ahead +, females ahead -.

\*\*Higher educated ahead +, less educated ahead –.

\*\*\*\*Higher positions ahead +, other positions ahead -.

Table IX condenses our findings by presenting the mini-max gaps in uses of free time by the variables listed in the left-hand column. Downward comparisons show which variables were making the greatest difference to the various uses of free time. We can see immediately the widespread and enduring influence of gender except in memberships of community associations. Family class origins also make an enduring difference to participation in out-of-home leisure activities and community associations. Respondents’ achievements in education and positions in or outside the labour force have become major influences on time spent watching television and online by age 25-29, and community association memberships also, thereby partly replacing class origins while reproducing the class differences that were found among 15-19 year olds (see also Roberts et al, 2018b). Social class origins, alongside gender, remained the main source of differences in rates of ‘going out’ in our oldest. 25-29 year old, age group. Thus in terms of free time uses, during the extended youth life stage the sexes were pulling further apart while social classes stayed apart.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The case for examining Big Leisure during an extended present-day youth life stage is the possibility of identifying underlying reformations of class, gender and other social divisions. Examining different ‘little leisures’ produces mixed results, all societally inconsequential (Roberts et al, 2011). Changes in social divisions in Big Leisure are more likely to destabilise a societal status quo, and both researchers and politicians have usually looked to youth to propel reforms. However, researchers must allow their findings to offer evidence of reproduction as well as transformation, and we have found more of the former in the South and East Mediterranean. The countries have been changing with young people in the vanguard, but in experiencing the effects rather than as change drivers. Demography has been the main driver. Since the mid-20th century the populations have quadrupled. The economies have not created jobs at an equivalent pace, and unemployment had been held in check only through the creation of swaths of low income self-employment and precarious low paid informal jobs, and leaving most women outside the labour force (Kovacheva et al, 2018a). Many young people are discontented and express this in recurrent street protests, then nothing changes (Roberts et al, 2018d). Protests were recurrent throughout the years preceding and have continued since 2011. Throughout political turbulence and stability, social divisions have remained constant in young people’s uses of free time.

It is a mistake to treat the South and East Mediterranean region as ‘developing’, situated somewhere between tradition and Western modernity. These are already modern societies. They have modern systems of public administration, education and health services (hence the decline in mortality rates and spectacular population growth). The societies and their people are part of global information flows and networks, and of the financialised global market economy. It is no longer possible for such recently modernised countries to absorb their swollen populations in manufacturing which then generates the wealth to employ more in business and consumer services, draws women into the paid workforces, and creates surges in upward social mobility. Young people are reproducing their countries’ versions of modern social roles and divisions in the course of building the best lives possible for themselves in the societies as they find them. These processes are exposed in Big Leisure. Here we see gender divisions being reproduced, and likewise class divisions that were originally formed in young people’s childhood families. These processes of reproduction are sustaining Arab-Islamic examples in a 21st century era of multiple modernities (see Roberts et al, 2017). **References**

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Ken Roberts is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Liverpool. His books include *Surviving Post-Communism: Young People in the Former Soviet Union* (2000), *Youth in Transition: Eastern Europe and in the West* (2009), *Class in Contemporary Britain* (2011), *Sociology: An Introduction* (2012), *The Business of Leisure* (2016), and *Social Theory, Sport, Leisure* (2016).

Ken Roberts

University of Liverpool,

Eleanor Rathbone Building,

Bedford Street South,

Liverpool L69 7ZA

England

Phone: 44-(0)1695 574962

## Email: [bert@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:bert@liverpool.ac.uk)

Siyka Kovacheva is Associate Professor at the University of Plovdiv. Her books include *Youth in Society. The Construction and Deconstruction of Youth in East and West Europe* (with C. Wallace) (1998), *Sinking or Swimming in the Waves of Transformation? Young People and Social Protection in Central and Eastern Europe* (2000), *Work-Life Balance: Young Working Parents between Opportunities and Constraints* (2010), ***1989 - Young People and Social Change after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*** (with C Leccardi, C Feixa, H Reiter and T Sekulić) (2012), and Young People in European Bulgaria: A Sociological Portrait. (with P-E Mitev) (2014).

Siyka Kovacheva,

Department of Applied Sociology

University of Plovdiv

Tsar Asen 24

Plovdiv 4000

Bulgaria

Email: [siykakovacheva@gmail.com](mailto:siykakovacheva@gmail.com)

Phone: +359 885832066

Stanimir Kabaivanov is Associate Professor at the University of Plovdiv. His research interests are in finance, artificial intelligence and the application of computational methods in social sciences. Works of interest are *Competing demands: Work and Child Well-being,* in *Ed/s “Quality of Life and Work in Europe*” (2011 with Lane L., van der Lippe T. and Back-Wiklund M.), *An overview of work-life balance (WLB) in Bulgaria.* (2012, with S. Kovacheva)*, Young people in search of a work-family balance (Changing landscapes for childhood and youth in Europe)* (2012 with S. Kovacheva) and *Econometrics for students in finance* (2013).

Stanimir Kabaivanov

Department of Finance and Accounting

University of Plovdiv

Tsar Asen 24

Plovdiv 4000

Bulgaria

Email: [Stanimir.kabaivanov@gmail.com](mailto:Stanimir.kabaivanov@gmail.com)

Phone: +359 898619567