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# Leisure Time as a Space of Change: Between Personal Transformation and the Animation of Others — The Case of Students of Cultural Animation

Czas wolny jako przestrzeń zmiany.  
Między transformacją własną a animacją innych —  
na przykładzie osób studiujących animację kultury

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine leisure time as a space for individual inner transformation among students of cultural animation. The theoretical framework encompasses selected approaches to leisure time, its multiple functions in individual life, and the significance of change as a constitutive idea of animation.

The empirical material consists of findings from a study conducted among 81 students of cultural animation at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising an analysis of participants' subjective definitions of leisure time as well as their indications of dominant and desired leisure activities. The analysis reveals that respondents primarily define leisure time in opposition to obligations, as a space for autonomous and pleasurable choices focused on psychological regeneration. Perceptual and recreational activities dominate their current practices,

## KEYWORDS

leisure time, cultural animation, personal transformation, socio-cultural change, cultural animator education

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

czas wolny, animacja kultury, transformacja osobista, zmiana społeczno-kulturowa, kształcenie animatorów kultury

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whereas creative and integrative forms occur significantly less frequently. Respondents clearly express the need to limit passive activities, particularly excessive use of social media, in favor of more activating, developmental, and creative forms of engagement.

The findings suggest that the conscious and constructive management of leisure time is a necessary condition for the authenticity and effectiveness of future cultural animators in initiating constructive humanistic socio-cultural change. Leisure time serves both as a tool for shaping social and creative competencies and as a space for experimenting with values, lifestyles, and new practices. It is therefore argued that education in the conscious and meaningful management of leisure time should be incorporated into cultural animator training programs, as it constitutes a necessary condition for their authenticity and effectiveness in initiating constructive humanistic socio-cultural change.

## ABSTRAKT

Celem raportu jest analiza czasu wolnego jako przestrzeni wewnętrznej transformacji jednostki u osób studiujących animację kultury. Przedmiotem opracowania są teoretyczne ujęcia czasu wolnego, jego wielorakie funkcje w życiu jednostki oraz znaczenie zmiany jako konstytutywnej idei animacyjnej.

Materiał empiryczny stanowią wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród 81 osób studiujących animację kultury na Uniwersytecie Marie Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie. Zastosowano metody jakościowo-ilościowe, polegające na analizie subiektywnych definicji czasu wolnego oraz wskazań dotyczących dominujących i pożądaných aktywności wolno-czasowych. Analiza wykazała, że respondenci definiują czas wolny głównie w opozycji do obowiązków, jako przestrzeń autonomicznych i przyjemnych wyborów skoncentrowanych na regeneracji psychicznej. W aktualnych praktykach dominują aktywności percepcyjne i rekreacyjne, podczas gdy formy twórcze i integracyjne pojawiają się znacznie rzadziej. Respondenci wyraźnie artykułują potrzebę ograniczenia biernych praktyk, zwłaszcza nadmiernego korzystania z mediów społecznościowych, na rzecz działań aktywizujących, rozwijających i twórczych.

Wnioski wskazują, że świadome, wartościowe gospodarowanie czasem wolnym stanowi warunek niezbędny autentyczności i efektywności przyszłych animatorów kultury w inicjowaniu konstruktywnie humanistycznej zmiany społeczno-kulturowej. Jest on zarówno narzędziem kształtowania kompetencji społecznych i twórczych, jak i przestrzenią

eksperymentowania z wartościami, stylami życia oraz nowymi praktykami. Postuluje się włączenie edukacji w zakresie świadomego, wartościowego gospodarowania czasem wolnym do programów kształcenia animatorów kultury, co stanowi warunek niezbędny ich autentyczności i efektywności w inicjowaniu konstruktywnie humanistycznej zmiany społeczno-kulturowej.

## Introduction

*Tempo libero, ozio, loisir, lazer, and leisure time*—all these terms refer to the fundamental idea of individuals freely choosing how to use the time available to them (Truszkowska-Wojtkowiak 2012). Every leisure-time decision entails responsibility on the part of the subject who makes it: responsibility both toward oneself and toward the environment in which one functions.

The issue of leisure time is therefore particularly significant for students of cultural animation, primarily because of the nature of their future professional activity. Animation is, after all, the act of “breathing life” into human beings, an invitation to initiate change, both in their surroundings and, above all, within themselves (Jedlewska 2006: 8). This change is intended to enable individuals to make use of their potential and available resources—including their leisure-time budget—in ways consistent with their aspirations and sense of self (Kargul 1997).

In light of this, students in cultural animation programs should exercise particular attentiveness and responsibility in caring for their leisure time and in the decisions which they make about it. Their future professional role is grounded in initiating change in others, which makes their own experience a kind of laboratory for professional practice.

Comparing the everyday leisure practices of cultural animation students with a vision of ideally managed leisure time makes it possible to identify trends in the pursuit of developmental activities that may shape new generations of animators and influence their future contributions to socio-cultural change. This study seeks to capture these trends and to examine the extent to which the leisure time of cultural animation students—both as practiced and as idealized—is consistent with the vision of a creative cultural personality

(Mencwel 2002) and constructively humanistic change (Kubinowski 2016), ideas that lie at the foundation of cultural animation.

## Change as a key idea of animation

Change is understood as one of the key characteristics of cultural animation and is defined as action that supports the “vivification, activation, and transformation” of both individuals and the socio-cultural environment, contributing in the long term to their personal and social development (Kubinowski 2015: 99).

The role of animation is to facilitate constructively humanistic change consisting in vivifying individuals toward fuller existence and liberating grassroots initiatives that manifest active participation, creativity, and engagement—not for the sake of animation itself, but for the sake of broadly conceived individual and social transformation (Kubinowski 2018). The aim of animation is to move people, to change their attitudes, to encourage the pursuit of knowledge, to cultivate sensitivity, and ultimately to invite them to lead creative and meaningful lives (Żebrowski 1994).

Often described as missionaries of education and culture, cultural animators function as practically oriented catalysts, activators, and midwives of change (Żebrowski 2006; Henzler, Skrzypczak 2006; Jedlewska 2009; Graczyk 2011, among others). They face the challenge of awakening in people a “desire for something better” and inviting them to refine their value systems in order to shape new, increasingly “enriched forms of coexistence” (Dyczewski 1993: 20).

They are at the forefront of promoting the meaningful management of leisure time, inviting reflection on limiting consumer behavior, and instilling responsibility for one’s own time as well as for the time of those with whom they work (Olbrycht 2006; Żebrowski 2006). It is particularly significant that vivification does not end with adding life or awakening fervor in others, but also involves liberating activity within oneself (Jedlewska 2006). An animator must be authentic and personally engaged in the processes of change they initiate—hence the pertinent question: “Is it not necessary, then, to breathe soul into those who are to breathe it into others?” (Kopczyńska 2006: 163).

## Concept and functions of leisure time: Theoretical perspectives

Defining leisure time constitutes a methodological challenge that, since researchers first undertook its investigation, has generated similar reflections—namely, that it is far more difficult to define leisure time in theory than to experience it in practice (Hemingway 1995; Roberts 1999; Koshar 2002; Rojek 2005; Csikszentmihalyi 2005, among others).

Positions emphasizing the multidimensional nature of leisure practices point to the diversity of experiences accompanying leisure-time activities (Mroczkowska 2020). Joffre Dumazedier, one of the pioneers of leisure studies, drew attention to the phenomenon of so-called semi-free time: activities that, although resulting from free time, may nonetheless take on the character of obligations (Dumazedier 1967). Leisure time is also a sphere for which people must struggle in everyday real and symbolic contests (Valtonen 2004). Theodor Adorno wrote about “dedicated time,” understood as time shaped by coercion with regard to its form and content, conditioned by social dependencies such as family or the work system (Adorno 1991). On the other hand, the term “free” signifies a space open to development and subject to individual choice, expressed through values, desires, aspirations, and needs (Stanek 2011).

This multiplicity of forms and interpretations makes it difficult to confine the concept of leisure time to a single universal definition. The definition proposed by John Neulinger is particularly helpful: he defines leisure as the undertaking of activities performed for their own sake, voluntarily and without pressure or coercion—activities that provide a sense of meaning and satisfaction and engage individuals at the deepest levels of their existence (Neulinger 1981). Pavelka, in turn, describes leisure time as time after or outside work that remains at the individual’s free disposal, allowing for “rest, entertainment, personal development, improvement of professional qualifications, and social activities” (Pavelka 2000: 20). Leisure time can thus be “appropriated, liberated, freed, and ultimately invested” (Truskowska-Wojtkowiak 2012: 16).

For the purposes of this study, two complementary categorizations of leisure time were employed. The first, proposed by Marian

Grochociński (1979), distinguishes four basic types of human activity during leisure time:

1. Creative activities: oriented toward personal development through creative pursuits, such as handicrafts, artistic creation, or artistic photography.
2. Socializing activities: supporting the development of social competencies, including participation in workshops and courses, as well as voluntary or charitable work.
3. Perceptual activities: facilitating development through appreciation of the works of others, including reading literature, watching films, or browsing online content.
4. Recreational activities whose primary aim is physical and mental restoration and the maintenance of psychophysical balance, undertaken through sports, participation in social games, walks, or excursions.

The second categorization refers to the functions of leisure time proposed by Jan Pięta (2004), that is, the functions that leisure time fulfills for individuals and the benefits that it may provide. These include:

1. Regenerative function: the restoration of physical and mental strength, enabling the maintenance of bodily equilibrium.
2. Compensatory function: alleviating the effects of unpleasant or exhausting obligations that limit an individual's sense of freedom.
3. Educational function: satisfying intellectual and cognitive needs and supporting mental development.
4. Integrative function: building interpersonal relationships and enhancing social competencies.
5. Cultural function: participation in culture through its reception, reproduction, and creative co-creation.
6. Educative function: supporting the internalization of values and social norms, as well as the formation of desired attitudes and lifestyles.

It is worth elaborating here on recent research that points to leisure time as a space for educational development. Renata Pater points to the need to cultivate a sound “culture of leisure time” already in the early stages of education (Pater 2015). She emphasizes that “education for leisure time is important due to learning to make decisions

concerning freedom of choice in spending leisure time, as well as the resulting consequences for awareness of full health and its maintenance” (Pater 2015: 27).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the present article, as it connects two dimensions: personal transformation through the conscious management of time and preparation for the role of a cultural animator. The author also underscores the role of cultural institutions: “Cultural activity manifests itself in processes of knowing, experiencing, assimilating, processing, and creating values and content of culture. It constitutes an integral part of the general life and professional activity of a human being. A person’s cultural activity extends to professional and social activity and vice versa” (Pater 2015: 21–22). For students of cultural animation, this means that their own participation in culture—both receptive and creative—constitutes an element of their professional education.

The author also refers to research by Michel Desmurget, which is relevant to the present discussion. His findings indicate that “watching television enforces passive perception, which does not stimulate the proper development of cognitive functions and displaces the effort necessary for reading, language development, attention, or imagination” (Desmurget 2012: 24–25). Although the article focuses on children, this observation is also pertinent to students and may suggest the need for the educational system to intervene more actively in habits related to time management—particularly in light of these findings.

Research on adolescent well-being (Nikiel, Kędzierska 2023: 85–86) has shown that “both school grades and school well-being were positively predicted by spending leisure time on painting and drawing.” The authors conclude: “Engagement in painting and drawing after school can support students’ creativity, help them manage negative emotions, and strengthen cognitive skills such as concentration, which potentially leads to improved academic performance and greater school well-being” (Nikiel, Kędzierska 2023: 86). These conclusions invite reflection on the leisure time of future cultural animation students, who need to experience the transformative power of creative practices in order to authentically offer them to others.

The central thesis of this study is the conviction that the leisure time of cultural animation students is not merely a space for relaxation,

but a laboratory of professional practice in which they develop the competencies necessary to initiate change authentically and effectively. Only animators who consciously shape their own leisure practices in accordance with the values of constructive humanistic change possess the credibility to invite others to undertake a similar process.

## Research methodology

The subject of this study was leisure time as a space for personal transformation and as a laboratory of professional practice for future cultural animators. The main aim was to examine how students of cultural animation understand, define, and practice leisure time, and subsequently to compare this with their vision of ideally managed leisure time. Particular emphasis was placed on analyzing the gap between current practice and the ideal model, with a view to the potential for personal transformation through the conscious management of leisure time.

The focus of the study was the perspective of cultural animation students on leisure time, not only in conceptual terms, but also in its practical and aspirational dimensions. The research sought to capture how they define leisure time, which forms of activity characterize their current practices, and what functions these activities fulfill in their lives. It was especially important to understand the differences between actual behaviors and the imagined ideal model of leisure-time use. In the background of these considerations, educational issues also emerged, including reflection on the knowledge and support respondents would need in order to move closer to realizing their vision of the “Ideal Me” in leisure time.

For the purposes of the study, an online survey was used, containing open-ended and semi-structured questions. This made it possible to collect both quantitative data on the frequency of activities undertaken and qualitative narrative material enabling an in-depth analysis of the meanings and values attributed to leisure time.

The research instrument covered several thematic areas: basic demographic information (including age, gender, year, and field of study), questions concerning individual definitions of leisure time, and descriptions of currently pursued activities along with their perceived benefits. Subsequent sections concerned desired activities,

those respondents wished to limit, their conceptions of the ideal way of managing leisure time, and the potential benefits associated with such a model.

The quantitative analysis involved counting respondents' indications within the categories proposed by Grochociński and subsequently quantifying the corresponding functional indications according to Pięta's model.

The study is exploratory and diagnostic. This methodological approach was chosen in response to the nature of the research problem, which requires both an exploration of the subjective meanings attributed to leisure time (the phenomenological dimension) and an analysis of specific types of activities and the functions they perform (the pragmatic dimension). This methodology enabled an in-depth, contextual interpretation of the numerical data through respondents' narrative material, which is particularly important in the case of a multidimensional phenomenon such as leisure time.

The research was conducted among 81 students enrolled in the cultural animation program at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin during the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample was purposive and included all available students who consented to participate. Among the respondents, 63 identified as women, 17 as men, and one as non-binary. The average age was 21.5 years, with participants ranging from 19 to 27 years old.

The structure of the research instrument allowed for an analysis of both the types of activities undertaken and the functions they serve. Presenting the perceived benefits from the respondents' perspective created space for reflection on the kinds of change they expect of themselves. The conclusions drawn in this section may serve as a reference point for designing educational and cultural initiatives that more effectively address the needs of future animators, who, while preparing to support the development of others, simultaneously test and shape their own approaches to managing leisure time.

## Research findings (Me in leisure time)

An analysis of respondents' answers to the question concerning their subjective definitions of leisure time reveals a coherent and consistent pattern of understanding this concept. This made it possible

to collect material rich in personal statements and spontaneous associations related to leisure time, allowing for the exploration of this phenomenon in a manner not constrained by theoretical approaches dominant in the literature.

The vast majority of respondents define leisure time primarily in opposition to obligations, understood as time free from educational activities, work, or domestic responsibilities. As one respondent expressed it, leisure time is “time in which we are free from obligations, work and school, etc. We are in a space where we want to be of our own will, where we can rest, relax and spend time well.”

A second, closely related category in respondents’ definitions is the emphasis on autonomy and voluntary choice. Students consistently stress that leisure time is a period in which they can make their own decisions and are not compelled to do anything.

A third clearly articulated feature in defining the phenomenon under study is an orientation toward regeneration and rest. Respondents consistently associate leisure time with relief from stress, fatigue, and cognitive and physical strain. Typical formulations include: “rest from people, stimuli,” “recharging social batteries,” “time for doing nothing,” and “escape from everyday routine.”

Respondents often describe leisure time as a space devoted exclusively to themselves, their needs and desires, a moment of self-focus. For many, it represents a conscious turning toward their own needs, desires, or emotions, strengthening their relationship with themselves and defining this time as “time for me, when I do something only for myself” or “time in which I can focus on myself.”

Also noteworthy are the relatively rare but significant definitions in which respondents recognize the developmental potential of leisure time, referring to self-development, cultivating passions, or self-care. This suggests that awareness of the educational and transformative role of leisure time exists, although it is not widespread.

In response to the question “Most often in my leisure time, I...,” respondents indicated specific activities, which were subsequently coded according to Grochociński’s typology. The results reveal a clear predominance of perceptual activities (162 indications), which constitute the most common form of leisure practice among respondents. In this category, participants mentioned watching films and series (Netflix, YouTube, television), browsing social media (TikTok,

Instagram, Facebook), reading books, magazines, and newspapers, listening to podcasts and music, and browsing online content.

Recreational activities (139 indications) represent the second most frequent category. These included practicing sports (gym workouts, yoga, running, ice skating), walking outdoors, napping and passive rest (lying down, sleeping), playing computer or console games, relaxing, unwinding, and meditation.

Socializing activities (69 indications) were reported by nearly as many respondents as creative activities. In this category, participants mentioned meeting with family and friends, engaging in social conversations, and participating in group gatherings.

Creative activities (67 indications) are also present in students' leisure practices, though noticeably less frequently than the other categories. These included playing musical instruments; writing (texts, diaries, blogs); drawing and painting; photography; handicrafts and other handmade activities; craftsmanship; dance and choreography; design; and creating games and fictional worlds.

Respondents were asked in a subsequent question to describe the benefits that they derive from their leisure-time activities. Analysis of the responses revealed that the most prevalent function of current leisure time is the regenerative function. More than half of the respondents (58 indications) explicitly mentioned rest and the restoration of physical and mental energy as the main benefits of their leisure activities at that time. Representative responses included: "rest and restoration of energy" and "relaxation."

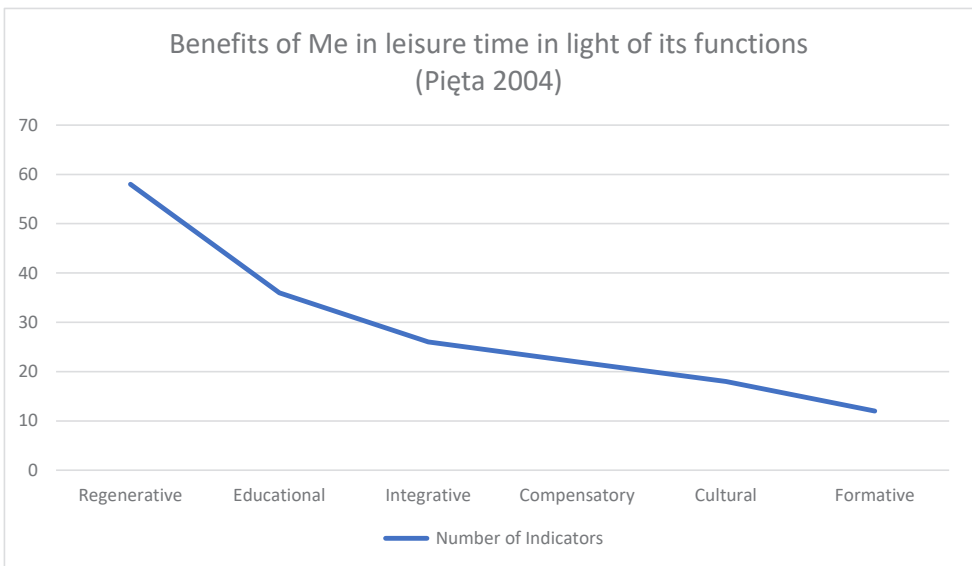
The second significant function is the compensatory function, mitigating the burdens of daily life. Respondents described this as "clearing the head of negative thoughts," "cutting oneself off from reality," "clearing the mind after a whole day of thinking, stress, and activity," or "unwinding from negative experiences."

An important dimension of leisure time also proved to be the educational function, with as many as 36 respondents mentioning gaining knowledge, broadening horizons, learning new things, developing interests, or deepening skills as benefits of their activities—particularly those of a perceptual nature (reading, watching educational materials) and a creative nature (learning new instruments or artistic techniques).

The integrative function, related to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, was mentioned by respondents who spent time with loved ones, although it was not always articulated as the primary goal. Respondents described benefits such as “support,” “interest,” and “good contact with oneself and with others.”

A less widespread but clearly articulated function was the developmental function. Respondents mentioned satisfaction from completed tasks, a sense of agency, a sense of fulfillment, and “satisfaction that I did something productive,” which suggests that leisure time serves not only as a space for regeneration but also for constructive experiences. Although the cultural function appeared less frequently and was not always explicitly named, respondents described benefits consistent with broader participation in culture, experiences of artistic growth, or “fulfillment through creative activities.”

**Chart 1.** Benefits of Me in leisure time



Source: Author’s own study.

### Research findings (Ideal Me in leisure time)

In the next section, respondents articulated their vision of a better, more ideal way of spending their leisure time. Comparing these

responses with their current practices reveals clear discrepancies and aspirations. Many expressed a desire to devote significantly more time to physically active recreational pursuits—40 indications referred to physical exercise, walking, and activities aimed at relaxation and vitality. Respondents wrote about increasing their level of physical activity, taking more walks, practicing sports, and engaging in strength training.

The second major group of responses concerns aspirations related to perceptual activities—38 indications referred to a more conscious and educational use of media. Respondents mentioned the desire to “read more books,” “watch more educational films,” “learn languages,” and “listen to educational podcasts,” suggesting that they recognize the educational potential of such activities.

A clear theme in these aspirations is the desire to pursue more frequently in creative activities, such as drawing, painting, dancing, composing music, writing, or handicrafts. Although creative activities do not dominate current practices, they appear much more prominently in respondents’ ideal vision of how they would like to manage their leisure time.

A significant number of responses also concern engagement with loved ones or the community. Respondents expressed the desire to “spend time with family and loved ones,” “actively participate in culture,” and “be there for others,” suggesting that they perceive leisure time as a potential space for strengthening community and social engagement.

Conversely, in response to the prompt “In my leisure time, I would like to do less...,” nearly half of the respondents (38 respondents) clearly articulated a desire to reduce perceptual, often passive, media-related practices. They expressed the wish to limit “mindless screen browsing,” scrolling through TikTok or Instagram, and watching “stupid videos” that add nothing to their lives. These responses reveal a clear self-awareness regarding the limited value or productivity of such activities.

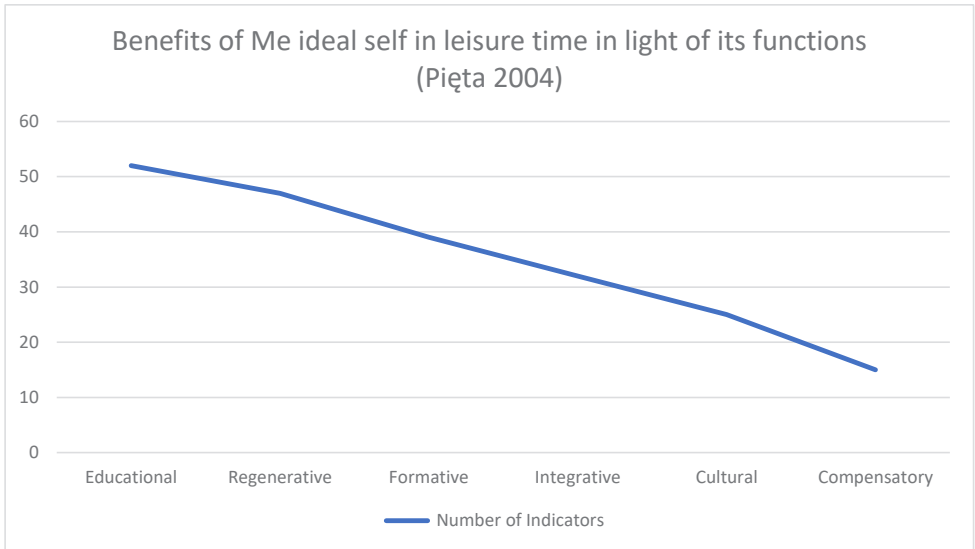
A second group of responses signals the desire to reduce passive mental habits. Respondents mentioned wanting to limit excessive thinking, overanalyzing life, or “worrying about obligations.”

A smaller but still significant group (19 respondents) expressed the desire to reduce passive forms of rest, such as napping, prolonged

sleep, or unproductive lying down. One respondent wrote that they would like to less often “devote her energy to others, stress that I rest.”

When asked about the benefits that ideally managed leisure time would bring, respondents’ answers demonstrated a strong pragmatic orientation toward personal transformation. They indicated a preference for activities aimed at:

1. Satisfaction from personal development (educational function). Respondents expressed a desire for greater self-development, broadening their horizons, and expanding their knowledge in areas of interest—recognizing leisure time as a tool for self-education and skill development.
2. Improved mental and physical well-being (regenerative function). Participants indicated a wish for greater psychological comfort, better mental and physical health, increased calm and concentration, and a sense of “being here and now,” highlighting the regulatory dimension of leisure time.
3. An increased sense of effectiveness (educative function). A sense of agency, the desire for self-improvement, the realization of one’s potential, and greater “versatility” were emphasized. Respondents mentioned wanting to “not waste time,” to “use the day at 110%,” and to “perform various tasks much more efficiently,” suggesting that their vision of leisure time is closely linked to productivity and self-realization.
4. Building stronger and more meaningful relationships (integrative function). Respondents frequently returned to the need to be more involved in activities that deepen relationships and foster a sense of belonging to a chosen community.
5. A sense of fulfillment and realization of artistic potential (cultural function). It is clearly important for respondents to participate in activities that support artistic self-expression, bring fulfillment through creativity, and sometimes enrich others’ time as well (e.g., through volunteer activities).
6. Inner peace (compensatory function). Respondents expressed a desire for inner peace, relaxation, and “letting go of pressure about things beyond my control,” indicating a need for a more holistic and grounded approach to leisure time—one that goes beyond simple regeneration or the reduction of stress caused by obligations.

**Chart 2.** Benefits of Me ideal self in leisure time

Source: Author's own study.

## Conclusions

The study conducted among 81 students of cultural animation at UMCS revealed that they define leisure time as an autonomous space free from obligations and focused on regeneration. Notably, none of the respondents associated leisure time with activities undertaken for the benefit of others, suggesting that it is perceived mainly as a space for self-realization.

A clear discrepancy emerges between current leisure practices and students' aspirations. Respondents articulate a need for transformation—a shift from passive consumption toward a more conscious and purposeful use of leisure time. This shift may be interpreted as an increasing sense of agency and a process of maturation toward their future professional role. By shaping their own practices, future animators create a kind of workshop for later community involvement, making leisure time a space for experimenting with animation strategies.

The comparison of current practices with aspirations also reveals a competency gap. Although students express the need for change,

they appear to lack skills in self-regulation and in the conscious selection of activities aligned with their values and goals. For the respondents, leisure time plays a dual role: it is both a space for regeneration and a potential tool for personal transformation. The conscious shaping of leisure time thus becomes a condition for the authenticity of future animators. While they demonstrate awareness of its transformative potential, realizing their aspirations requires educational support aimed at developing self-regulatory and reflective competencies.

A key recommendation arising from the study is the inclusion of education on conscious leisure time management in cultural animator training programs. This does not imply imposing fixed models or scenarios, but rather creating space for reflection on time as a valuable resource. Potentially effective approaches could include open, student-led sessions for sharing experiences grounded in their interests and values. Training programs should stimulate the development of creative, social, and reflective competencies, while teaching the principles of conscious leisure time management. Such preparation would support the emergence of animators capable of initiating social change, whose credibility is based on authentic personal transformation.

Simultaneously working on oneself while preparing to work with others makes leisure time a key element of both the professional and personal development of a cultural animator. For educators, this entails the challenge of preparing individuals who are able to treat leisure time as an investment—both in themselves and in the communities in which they will act as catalysts for constructively humanistic change.

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