

The Use of Greek Working Women's Leisure Time in Educational Activities

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Abstract

During the last three decades, there have been significant changes in the lives of women in Greece. Women's role and status have been upgraded; their way of life has undergone a complete transformation by work changing the management of domestic, professional and personal time. Within these different temporalities of their everyday lives; a contradictory social time named leisure is raised; and it is in this way that a struggle for personal advancement; and self expression arises and is accomplished by constructively and creatively making the most of this leisure time. The purpose of this study is to explore the practices and the meanings of education during women's leisure time; as well as the motives and the intentions that urge them to take part in the corresponding educative activities. The method of the study was qualitative, through an individual interview of women who already made the most of their leisure time educational. The main findings of this study show that women with a basic education consider learning during their free time necessary for their personal development; as well as the creative development of their skills; while seeking social support and educational programs that are equivalent to their real personal and professional needs.

Keywords: Leisure, Women, Greece, Adult education

1. Introduction

A woman's education during her free time and its overall cultural analysis is an issue concerning Greek women's world that has not been adequately studied because there is either superficial or very little scientific research conducted on this subject.

None of the social studies researched have examined the relationship between leisure time; culture and education. As Aitkinson (2003) underlined nor have any of the studies delved in depth into the cultural policies and mentality governing working women in industrial and developed countries when it comes to the creative use of leisure time.

Most of the theoretical studies researching women's free time and use of leisure have a quantitative character (Maruani, 2006; European Commission, 2004; Greer 1999; Maratou Alipranti, 1995; A look at leisure, 1988). Specifically, data on leisure time has been produced by time use surveys while the statistical information is referred either to the amount of women's leisure related to sex and time constraints associated with family and work commitments or to their poor participation in leisure activities (Haworth, 2007). The lack of qualitative approaches in these characteristics is obvious; for example the needs, motives to participate, attitude, perceptions, and obstacles faced during this effort.

On the other hand, are insufficient because they are not tested in the wider range of women's educational experiences and their range is not extended to include what the women themselves have to say.

Within this framework, and having as a primary stimulus the conclusions of recent investigations (Dede, 2009; Barvitsiotis et al., 2009; Jarvis, 2004) and recent statements of contemporaries feminists (Green, 1990; Deem, 1992) as well as personal observations thanks to my ten years systematic employment with adults training as a teacher, that women with only a basic education (high school degree) invest less in their leisure time, this study has

attempted a total and substantiated approach and mapping of the educational and behavioural experiences of these women in Greece.

More specifically reinforcing the point that adults with basic education not easily participate in educational processes, because of insecurity, mistrust, low aspirations, negative attitudes towards education and sense of inferiority to the low level of their achievements (Zarifis, 2004), the emphasis in this study lies in

- a) the real reasons (social and personal) set by the women themselves, which affect their psychology and motivate them to make constructive use of their free time,
- b) the mentality of these women concerning the creative use and function of their free time,
- c) the way they will use this time for learning in order to take advantage of their free time,
- d) their personal considerations on the most effective arrangement of their free time in relation to educational and cultural programs available.

2. Theoretical Background

Leisure time was first documented as a subject of scientific consideration in 1899 in the classical work of Thorstein Veblen '*The Theory of the Leisure Class*' (1982), but it is in the prosperous second half of the 20th century that became an autonomous object of social thought and sociological research. And yet until the end of the 1960's, women's leisure time in and out of the house was considered to be of little importance. In 1974, the French sociologist Joffre Dumazedier, known as the father of the sociology of leisure time, distinguished this social time not only from women's professional occupation, as sociologists studying work had already noted, but also from their domestic and familial obligations (Dumazedier, 1974; Dumazedier & Carisse, 1975).

This proved to be an important change because, for many intellectuals, family time had become synonymous to leisure time to such a degree that they believed that the family tended to lose its traditional, economic and ritualistic character and be transformed into a «community of leisure» whose various activities reinforce the relationship between the various members of the family (Fougeyrollas, 1959).

As the French sociologist Evelyne Sullerot (1978: 503) characteristically wrote: «Despite the overall reduction in the time spent working (229 days per year and approximately 40 hours per week), working women, especially married women, continue to seek personal time by trying to take time from their responsibilities, their family, their husband, their children, God and society».

Later in the 1980's, with the expansion of the so-called second feminist movement, the position and image of women in developed societies radically changed. During this time, there was an increase in the studies concerning women's leisure time giving shape in brief to two basic directions: a) the lack of free time and the nature of the restrictions imposed upon women (Wearing, 1999) and b) the consideration of leisure as a social time offering to women a relative autonomy from traditional roles despite the self-imposed and social restrictions inflicted upon them (Deem, 1986; Shank, 1986).

Looking in the literature (Glasser, 1973; Kelly, 1983) we find consensus that the activities developed within the leisure, nurture the processes of creating a new identity centered on autonomy and empowerment.

In this approach leisure time and other activities (artistic, educational, etc.) bestow women with the strength and energy needed to resist the various restrictions presented by daily life. Women strive to usurp this «stolen» time and learn to demand and resist institutionalized authority (Shaw, 1994).

In Greece, although societal attitudes towards gender roles have changed and new employment opportunities have opened to women, time budget surveys show that working women continue to carry over 80% of household and family chores. (Agalopoulou, 1996). Moreover, Greek women are trapped between the stereotypical confines of their role in society and their own personal aspirations, therefore experiencing their leisure time with guilt, even when they are spending this time for vocational training or personal development (koronaïou, 1996)

Consequently, the important conflicts that Greek women are still experiencing between traditional lifestyles and emerging new values in all fields of their life are more tenacious in the use of leisure time. Leisure becomes a personal and «existential» time aiming at self-realization (Dumazedier, 1988).

3. Adult Education and Greek Women

In England as well as France those who envisioned (and continue to envision) leisure time at the service of a wider cultural development directly linked this to education, and especially to adult education, which would, in turn, be linked to democracy, the notion of the citizenship and the pursuit of a fuller life (Jarvis, 2003).

To French scholars along with many educators, leisure time proved to be a milestone in all facets of life (work, family, school) just as adult education proved to be a milestone for the official education system, contesting the established notions concerning the predominance of a typical school education (Boutinet, 1998). Both fields, leisure time and adult education, seemed particularly subversive to scientific knowledge and to social intervention in a social world living under the impact of radical social movements (e.g. May '68), contesting cultural authority, and having as a result, for some to almost equate the society of leisure time to a wider educational society (Dumazedier & Samuel, 1976).

In the midst of all this social upheaval, the feminist movement played a dominant role in shaping the scientific direction of the studies concerning leisure time. Jane Thompson (1983), representing radical feminism, turned her attention from early on to the idea of *visibility* and *invisibility* of women receiving a liberal education in England. She pointed out that although women comprise the majority of the students in adult education, they are visible only as mothers and invisible in any other perspective.

It is true that still in our days many Greek women define themselves to a great degree on their availability to their family. In so many instances, women are considered responsible for the crisis in the contemporary family by society, for the increase in the rate of divorce and for child neglect. Their job and their expectations for job advancement are frequently implicated by men as detrimental, while, at the same time, employers incriminate women for becoming mothers and instead expect women to put in longer hours at work.

This can explain the poor participation rate of women in life-long learning programs in Greece, which is slightly less than that of men (2% compared 1.8 % in 2006) but is significantly lower than that of women in northern countries where women's participation has reached 30% (Tsourbakas, 2005; Karantinos, 2008; Mavri, 2009).

More analytically, the free time women devote to educational pursuits (such as seminars, vocational training, general education, and self education courses) has, as a result, their greatly evolving in the time needed to acquire or complete the knowledge, skills and abilities which either have a direct connection to their career or to their social and personal life.

No matter what method they follow, whether it is the systematic learning of a foreign language or taking part in sports or music on an amateur level, it shows the up-to-date dynamics involved in the use of leisure time and the educational policies involved that take place beyond these women's workplace (Koronaïou, 2001).

Moreover is a substantial start of discovering autonomy in a society where the perpetuation of gender ideologies and inequalities is strongly grounded in traditional patterns.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participant characteristics

The sample of 15 women formed with convenience sampling (Cohen & Manion, 2000) or as mentioned in literature "deliberate theoretical sampling" (Mason, 2003)

The 15 women chosen, however, did not deliberately present a homogeneous character when viewing their personal and professional profile, but instead covered a wide range of backgrounds and lifestyles so as to meet the criteria for the study. The study included women with a basic education, women who worked in either the public or the private sector, women who worked part or full time, women between the ages of 30 and 50, and women single, or married, with or without children (Iosifidis, 2008; Mason, 2003).

4.2 Sampling procedures

In order to identify the above survey population, were sought bodies and institutions, where developing typical, atypical, public or private forms of lifelong learning and adult education, in which working women could be active in educational leisure time, attending long or short programs.

Selected among them: the Public Technical College (EPAS) in the municipality of Ilion, the private Center for Computer Studies (ITCS) in the same area, the Petroupolis Municipality Cultural Center, and the Institute of Vocational Training (IEK) in the municipality of Metamorphosis.

4.3 Measures and covariates

The method of the research was based on the qualitative approach, using individual semi-structured interviews granted by 15 women who were already making constructive use of their leisure time.

The interviews took place from the beginning of February to the end of March for the year 2009-2010, and their duration was between 40 and 60 minutes so that each woman had as much time as needed in order to avoid giving hasty and superficial responses (Robson, 2007).

The women were given the same number and type of questions so that the data could easily be categorized and analyzed (Bell, 2001).

There basic questions of the interviews were separated into four basic topics and the contents focused on the following research questions.

- 1) The reasons given by women with a relatively basic education to explain their educational and learning behavior when taking part in educational pursuits in their free time.
- 2) How they explain the creative use of their free time.
- 3) Which educational strategies they develop and which techniques they adopt to make use of their free time.
- 4) Which parameters they use to correlate their free time with culture and education.

The qualitative processing and analysis of the data from the interviews was carried out by using language analysis and includes all the procedures of grouping, categorizing and theorizing them, having as a goal to receive answers to these research questions (Bird et al., 1999; Iosifidis, 2008).

5. Results

5.1 Constraints and limits of free time

The women of our sample, especially the married ones with children, had no or very limited free time (1-2 hours) on a daily basis, which was due not only to their job, but also to their numerous household and childcare responsibilities. And yet, their desires for more personal free time, as well as the value they placed on it, are evident in the manner in which they arrange their affairs so as to accomplish this. As H., 47 years old, with two children says: *«I have free time because I schedule my affairs. In this way, I have two hours of free time every afternoon»*. On the other hand, women who are single and do not have to take on the role of mother and wife, have an unlimited amount of free time.

5.2 Free time as a personal time

In general terms, the women who took part in the study, equated the notion of free time with the desire for an «existential form of personal freedom», through the use of their own time which is distinct from family free time. This spirit of individuality is clearly expressed through their individual desires on a personal level, such as the aspiration to spend time to them, to relax, to read, to have a good time, to get away and let off steam from their everyday problems. *«Free time for me means the time I have at my disposal to manage as I see fit, to do «as I please». In other words, to sit home and relax with a good book, to go out for coffee, to rest, to relax in my own way»* (I., 44 years old).

5.3 Leisure as an important social time

Leisure time for many of the women of our sample plays a decisive role in their lives. It makes them happy; it makes them feel “whole”. They report feeling more conscious and acknowledged its value, a more progressive perception on how to manage their daily time, insight into their needs and rights, aspirations and demands for a better quality of life. A characteristic quote is from M., 46 years old, who mentions that: *«One or two hours of free time are precious because I have the chance to do what I've always dreamed of doing»* and from G., 32 years old, who says: *«free time is very important because I am under the impression that I don't live simply to work. That's why I'll do anything to have free time during my day »*.

5.4 The motives for use of free time through education

Concerning the motives to get an education during free time in general terms, the views held by the women seem to correlate with the bibliographical reports which present the motive for participation these women have as being personal pleasure and spiritual rejuvenation, socialization, their cognitive interest, acquiring further knowledge and skills for their personal and intellectual development, and in order to improve and advance at work (Cross, 1981; Long, 1983). A characteristic quote is from A., 37 years old: *«My deep desire was to do something that I'd like and would pick me up psychologically. I wanted to do something for myself that would fulfil and rejuvenate me»*. G., 43 years old added: *«I wanted to acquire a certificate in computer studies which would enhance my biography sheet»*.

Furthermore, the women of our sample typically mention the impact of their family and social environment, as well as the impact of their daily routine, the formation of a new identity, personal, social and professional

cultivation, the absence of professional insecurity (A look at leisure, 1988; Koronaiou, 2001; Jarvis, 2003; Cross, 1981), as secondary motives. These motives reveal the impact of social dynamics that help shape them, along with the initial reasons mentioned, adding the women's need for personal conquests through free time, such as the development of all facets of their lives, the liberation and reinforcement of their autonomy. At the same time, this confirms their use of free time as a means of acquiring qualifications and the appropriate resources to give them a better foothold professionally. A., 38 years old, mentions characteristically: *«I deemed it necessary to hold a degree, acquiring more qualifications, and decreasing my insecurity concerning the future in case I leave work»*, while M., 46 years old, says: *«I always wanted to have quality of life. I could never be satisfied simply with the role of wife, mother, or employee. I considered it necessary to get in touch with myself»*.

5.5 Expectations for the participation in learning activities during free time

The basic motives for participation in learning activities are reinforced by realistic social, professional and personal goals and expectations for further development and advancement, especially conscious and specific ones, which prove that women link learning during their free time with a sense of fulfilment, completeness and development on many levels.

What becomes evident is that each woman's orientation concerning her goals to learn, are determined by different reserves of experiences they have each encountered, and by the different social roles they are called to carry out within the framework of their daily lives (Mc Givney, 1993).

For example the learning goals of D., 43 years old, a private sector employee in a school cafeteria and mother of two grown children, have to do with acquiring the knowledge and skills which will increase her prospects and advance her professional career. As she emphasizes: *«I want to do something that will help me find a job with better working conditions»*.

However, D., 38 years old, an employee at a day care center and mother of five young children - influenced by her work environment - sets social goals such as the successful upbringing of her children. She says: *«I'm not doing this so much for my job as I am for gaining knowledge that will better help me raise my children and gain greater insight into their psyche»*.

Additionally, M., 46 years old, a government employee and mother of three children, with less pressure in her daily life because of favourable working conditions, presents personal goals which are linked to her mental well-being and sense of accomplishment. She says: *«I only look forward to joy, to the outlet that leads to happiness. At 47, I'm not hoping for a career. I just want to fulfil my dreams, my hobby»*.

On the other hand, E., 44 years old, a private sector employee and mother of two grown children, looks forward to her self-fulfilment and to strengthening herself and her self-confidence: *«for me, it comes as a reward for my efforts. In other words, I feel that I have personally accomplished something that I have managed to make a decision and see it through»*.

5.6 Satisfactory feelings from participating in learning processes during leisure time

What is noteworthy is that the women taking part in the study feel satisfied and excited by participating in learning activities, without conveying ambivalence, internal conflict, and compromise. This shows not only an emotional balance, but also mental fulfilment as well as confidence in their opinions and choices. H., 32 years old, says: *«I feel really good. The group has blended well together, and I'm excited about the whole process»*. In this respect, M., 46 years old, says: *«I feel so good that there is no chance for me to miss class, unless I'm running up a fever. It gives me satisfaction and joy, and it is the only time that I'm not feeling stressed and I can leave everything else behind»*.

5.7 The importance and necessity of acquiring an education during leisure time

A substantial discovery that clearly proves the creative use of free time is that education in leisure time is presented by women as significant and necessary. The reasons that women of our sample evoke can be considered as significant factors of a more mature sense of direction concerning personal recovery, encouragement, restructuring and growth of their personality, a tendency for professional progress, gaining status and sociability, and a need for adding new, creative directions to everyday life. The women appear ready, eager, clearly empowered and fully-aware of the next step they want to take in their lives: *«It is very important because I feel that I am making my own individual effort to improve my existence. I am offering myself additional education, and opening new windows of opportunity in my life»* and *«Yes, it is important because I believe that any form of education during free time, takes you beyond the narrow confines of your family, while, at the same time, creates the process of personal development and contributes to out qualifications»*.

5.8 Satisfaction from participation in learning processes

The study presents a satisfactory level of participation by the women in terms of the variety in the learning processes during their free time, with only a few exceptions due to family responsibilities. This shows that, on the whole, there is a positive attitude, mood and activation for making use of free time creatively, and developing similar policies and procedures in everyday life. We could state that the women of our study do not consider their life as a passive existence which merely functions, but as a creative entity that tries to broaden its free time with activities which support their creativity.

The desire for education and cultural engagement is clear, just like their interest in personal development. At the same time, it establishes the existence of a voluntary and not obligatory relationship with life-long learning, as well as the desire to enrich our everyday lives.

Some of the most popular forms of education during leisure time however, seem to be systematic short or long term training seminars within the company, the continued vocational training programs for adults organized by the Ministry of Education that women who work in the public sector attend, and the self-financed vocational programs that women who work in the private sector prefer.

M., 46 years old, a government employee says: *«Over the last 10 years, I've been taking part in many educational seminars organized at my place of work»* and H., 47 years old, also a government employee, says: *«Last year, I participated in an annual program for Computer Programming organized by the Ministry of Education through distance learning, successfully passed the course and received certification. In the past, I had also attended similar computer programming courses also organized by the Ministry, but the courses were longer (50 hours). Three years ago, I attended the 250 hour lifelong learning course at the adult learning centers in Kato Patissia on the subject of «Economics and Administration»».*

5.9 Interpretations of the creative use of free time

Taking into account the individual meanings that the women are presenting for the creative use of their free time, it becomes clear that their reasoning is devoid of a personal and social time that is vacant, shapeless, passive and dull, but, on the contrary, they feel that time is beneficial and constructive. As a result, they present their sense of completeness, their mental rejuvenation and their cultural values, such as volunteering and offering their services to the community. I., 44 years old, says: *«Creative free time is time that – by having fun – you have meaningful results»* and E., 44 years old, says: *Creativity is to me something that satisfies my soul and makes me feel complete and happy in my everyday life ».*

5.10 Creativity as a vehicle for cultural development and participation in everyday life

It is worth noticing that the women of our sample positively evaluate the contribution of creative activities to the wider social and cultural development, proving that deeper qualities and cultural aspirations inherently exist in their value system, and advocate a more progressive and creative stand in life. B., 30 years old, mentions: *«Creative activities give rise to new incentives, recreations, images, experiences, new ways of dealing with everyday life, which trigger them into action and help them evolve in the society they live in. With more incentives, you escape the old and conventional, and perceive things around you from a different perspective ».* In other words, women seem to have developed cultural and educational awareness when it comes to adopting creative experiences in their free time. At the same time, the positive attitude and mood that they present when incorporating creative activities into their everyday life - even though it may be unfeasible or difficult because of their lack of free time or because of their fluctuating work schedule - incorporates the tendency of individual progress and improvement, of development, of movement, even though these factors may hinder their prospects for a richer life.

5.11 Difficulties in accessing information about educational programs during free time

Our study substantiates the fact that access to information about educational programs isn't as easy for all the women examined in the study to obtain. The ease in accessing information can be interpreted as: a consequence of individual initiative (for example: *«It wasn't difficult, I just looked into it on my own. I simply took the initiatives»*), as a matter of luck, or simply a result of a coincidence (*« It was easy because I went to City Hall, saw a poster concerning the municipality's educational programs which, among other things, had the art program I was interested in, so I signed up for it»*).

What also becomes evident is that the lack of specialized knowledge and access to sources of information on the Internet hinders some of the women from access to information about the available educational programs. What is encouraging, however, is the fact that -compared to the unfavourable conditions concerning educational programs- most of the women agree that their participation is easier, especially in the case of social reasons. On the other hand,

institutional obstacles such as bureaucracy constitute hindrances to the participation of some of the women. D., 38 years old with five children, is a characteristic example: *«My participation went without a hitch because the criteria for studying at the Institute of Vocational Training (IEK) were favourable for those who met them because they could obtain more points due to age and the number of children they had».*

5.12 Criteria for attending learning activities

For the women of the study, like any adult student, certain factors are considered to be important and are rated on a scale before a decision about what to learn is made. Such criteria are: the financial cost, access to the learning institute, the duration of the course, the rate of participation, the good reputation and reliability of the learning institute responsible for the program, the subject of study, the flexibility of the program and, finally, an accredited title of studies. Some of the most characteristic statements made by the women were: *«My basic criteria were: the course itself, the distance of the school from my house, and the five hours of class. I wouldn't be able to go farther away or attend class for more hours. Another criteria was the cost, because the cost of a private school is prohibitive while the cost of a public school is minimal».*

5.13 Is learning in free time a conscious choice?

The women unanimously agree that their choice of learning activities in their free time was a completely conscious choice, which states that, as individuals, they are definitely more defined, more capable and more determined to satisfy their personal desires. At the same time, a conscious choice states an action that didn't occur by chance but by mature thought, as well as complete self-knowledge and a reconciliation of our external «abilities», a belief in oneself, and self-control when it comes to actions and self-definition. Phrases like: *«I made a decision and decided to stick to it no matter what»* and *«I had thought about it long before making a decision»* support these arguments.

5.14 The supporting and deterring factors for participation in free time activities

What is proved particular important in the study is the close-knit family environment these women have (parents, husband, children) who support their efforts to make use of their free time constructively, which further supports their motives and interest in learning (Jarvis, 2003).

The working women of the study seem to need the emotional and practical support from their family environment in order to be able to break free from the responsibilities and duties created by their role in society. And yet, the ascertainment that men participate in the upbringing of their children and in housework refutes the bibliography (Koronaïou, 2007; Agalopoulou, 1996; Simeonidou, 2007; Maratou-Alipranti, 1995), proving that the closed circle of the Greek family is starting to change by overcoming the stereotypes and outdated notions, creating fertile and favourable conditions for the emancipation and personal development of women. Some of the things the women said are: *«My husband urged me to get involved, seeing that I've been painting all these years. He dispelled my inhibitions by helping me with the children, with the housework, with the shopping, therefore regulating my work hours»* and *«My family supported me psychologically and practically with the housework, or else I'd never be able to have done it».*

Another significant discovery is the fact that these specific women were so determined to realize their desires that they encountered no factor to deter them. As E., a mother of two children says: *«There were no deterring factors. For me, they don't count. I wanted to do it and I did. No one could stop me».*

On the other hand, E., referred to negative influences such as derogatory remarks and demeaning attitudes from her wider social and family circle, which were overcome and cast aside, or, in the course of things, settled. B., a mother of two young children, says: *«A deterring factor was my extended family environment (my in-laws), who frowned upon my pursuit and considered it unnecessary to me. They could not imagine me as anything other than the traditional role of wife, mother and housewife.*

The only thing they managed to accomplish was to negatively influence my mental state in the beginning. According to these accounts, the only deterring or, better yet, discouraging factors hindering them from participating in free time activities were certain circumstantial obstacles (staggered working hours, and the difficult pace of daily life), institutional (difficulty in access and transportation, the financial cost) and sentimental (anxiety and guilt from neglecting children, stress). These factors agree with the proposed bibliography of many scholars (Zarifis, 2005).

5.15 The main obstacles for participating in learning activities

Ten basic aims concerning women's desires to learn in their free time are pointed in this study. More specifically, there is the lack of reinforcing factors such as family encouragement and support, conditions and institutions such as the lack of social policies in the use of free time, information concerning existing programs, motivation from the

work environment, freedom and autonomy, physical exhaustion, the prohibitive financial cost, the poor learning and cultural models which create a negative predisposition and passiveness along with personal inhibitions.

These appear to be the factors the most likely to discourage participation. Moreover, it is worth to mention remarks as: *«A basic reason is the fact that women in my age usually have young children, therefore more care is required at home, which has as a result a lack of free time, let alone time for learning activities»*. *«On the other hand»*, the same woman continues, *«perhaps they have never been encouraged or motivated to think and feel the internal need to do so»*. Another quote was: *«I believe they may want to, but are afraid to express this desire to their family or their family may not approve, considering Greek families still cling to clichés concerning the dominant role between the two sexes»*. It is obvious that the women taking part in this study are not the ones responsible for being allowed or prohibited from participating in learning activities in their free time. Nor do the reasons lie in the restrictions they place upon themselves. Instead, the reasons lie in the dynamics that exist between them and their social and cultural environment. In other words, they refer to the given facts and conditions of Greek society, work motives, and the dominant social stereotypes that exist between the two sexes and their roles in the family.

5.16 Opportunities and forms of education during free time

It is important to mention that most women taking part in the study, though they acknowledge that opportunities exist and that it is possible to use leisure time for educational purposes, showing that they accept their function and value, they believe that they lack information. E., mentions: *«I believe that there are opportunities, and whoever seeks information shall find it, but, in general, there is mostly ignorance. I personally am only aware of the public training programs»*. Information about such programs seems to be non-existent, and, as a result, the knowledge acquired is limited. B., sums things up when she says: *«There are more and more opportunities, like the Open University where you can learn at home, private institutes to learn foreign languages or computers programming, the IEK [Vocational Training Institutes], and many educational seminars held by clubs, cooperatives and government departments which don't cost much»*.

5.17 Supporting factors

Some of the most significant proposals that most of the women in the study repeatedly mention, regarding the support education provides in their free time, are: a) an emphasis in publicizing the educational programs from the learning institutions implementing them b) better quality in their design by becoming more innovative and effective c) education during leisure time in combination with the development and cultivation of an educational conscience d) greater familiarity with cultural and learning activities e) reinforced vocational training f) a decrease in the financial restraints that hinder access to programs by increasing the public educational institutions that utilize adult education programs g) taking their needs into consideration when planning social policies for working women.

These proposals constitute –apart from the personal needs of these women– an evaluation of the existing situation in Greece, with an emphasis on the lack of satisfaction regarding the existing system of lifelong education. The conditions concerning learning during leisure time do not seem to be particularly favourable for working women (lack of information, high financial cost) and there are no actions or social practices on the same level with their real needs which work in their favour (policies planning the increase of free time, vocational training at work)

5.18 Balance among leisure time, culture and education

The women's desires concerning the balance among leisure time, culture and education have, to a great degree, to do with broadening educational-cultural opportunities, choices concerning leisure time, and making good use of these choices in the long run. This can be accomplished either by taking advantage of the wide range of activities offered by the social or professional environment, or by participating to activities with no financial cost. One noteworthy remark was: *«It would be perfect, if I could make long term leisure time plans based on a wide range of cultural/educational activities and not short term ones based external limitations and obligations»*. It is obvious that the women of our study display an intense longing to actively use their free time and take part in the social – cultural goings on of Greek society. The only thing they need is –in various phases of their lives– to have access to educational and cultural activities which would allow them to function on multiple levels, to develop themselves, to adjust to changes, to self-define.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study shed a positive light on free time and its constructive use by the groups of women interviewed, since most expressed a positive rating, creative prototypes, a manifest progressiveness and a conscious tendency for further personal development.

Even though these women were intensely focused on their families, they acknowledged that their free time played a decisive role in their lives and they strived for higher levels of individuality and self-fulfilment, seeking the opportunity to do what they want, to become autonomous from traditional roles and conformism, to fulfil unfulfilled longings of the past (Aitchison, 2003; Jones & Symon, 2001; Igglesi, 1997; Koronaïou, 1996).

Contemporary Greek women dare to fight against the dominant patriarchal models.

This means that they see themselves as taking an active part in improving the quality of their lives, defining free time as personal time and separating it from work, housework and various other family obligations and essential to keeping a balance in daily life.

As the women themselves believe that any form of education in their free time liberates them from the narrow constraints of work and family, while at the same time, activates the process of personal development and qualification acquisition, they seek a formal or informal education offering themselves new opportunities on a personal, social and professional level.

This tendency could be even further reinforced, if they could enjoy the needed emotional and practical support from their family environment (parents, husband and children) diminishing, this way, feelings of guilt and personal inhibitions.

It seems however that Greek society is finding it difficult to adopt and accept more progressive notions regarding women's autonomy and independence within the framework of family responsibilities and the time they spend on themselves through the use of self-learning and education.

The educational goals and activities that they chose vary and are determined by their individual experiences, their interests, the possibilities provided by their social and work environment, their financial independence, the availability of free time. No differentiation was noted concerning their age.

What is worth noting, is that their educational opportunities are related to their aesthetic cultivation and creativity through art (painting), confirming their bibliographic, amateur, artistic pursuit (Maruani, 2006; A look at leisure, 1988), or by studies in the field of health (X-ray technicians, pharmaceutical assistant).

At the same time, they seek a specific quality in the chosen learning experiences during their leisure time and within pre-set time limits by presenting particular importance to their chosen field of study – in the reliability of educational institutions and in the organization and the times classes are held.

What concerns them most is to be able to make the most of what little free time they have with a wide range of learning and cultural activities, and access to free participation, whether directly or free admission at no financial cost.

On the other hand, obstacles such as the difficulty in accessibility, low attractiveness of the educational subjects, tuition fees, the strict schedules of the courses, as well as the lack of information, are the main factors that discourage participation, limiting their disposition and readiness to learn.

At this point, it must be noted that the Greek women's leisure time is understood to be an autonomous pursuit based on their own initiatives and capabilities and not as a result of an organized social-educational policy. The possibilities of leisure time even though they exist, are not made known by any specific media, and social structures and conditions pertaining to this, do not seem particularly versatile and, therefore, not particularly favourable and effective. What is characteristic is the lack of welfare policies which increase free time, childcare facilities or guidance at their place of work.

The women themselves believe that, in order for their prospects to improve, for their interest to be revived, and for their participation to be reinforced, emphasis must be placed on the institutional regulations concerning the system of lifelong learning. Particularly, it is important to enforce legislation concerning the quality guidelines in planning educational programs pertinent to women's needs and to the better reconciliation of their family, work, and personal life.

From this point of view, free time is an objective prerequisite for the increase in participation to vocational training and life-long learning. In this context our study shows that what women really need is more free time and the possibility to control it themselves developing a personal way of life which will allow them to achieve creative goals in their daily lives.

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