



Leisure-time centres in Iceland.

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Preface

I have decided to write this project, because I was truly inspired by work of my colleagues in Brosbaer. I want to thank all staff and leaders, who had been working with me for 4 years. When I came to Iceland from Russia in 2010, I tried to work in different places in Reykjavik, but work with children was the most interesting and meaningful for me.

Especially I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, who helped me a lot with my work and guide me in the right direction. She has supported my ideas and given me many constructive suggestions.

And most of all, my deep and warm thanks to children in Brosbaer, who gave me such essential experience in my life.

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understand the university code of conduct (November 7, 2003, <http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/sidareglur>) and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited to all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work. Signed: Germina Kharlanova.

Reykjavík, 9. 05. 2016

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Abstract

This theoretical project arises important questions about leisure-time centres in Iceland. This work is a product of personal experience in the field of after school care programs and research database. This project has an aim to explore the work of leisure-time centres in Reykjavik and to look at different aspects of such centres in general. The main significance of the study is to explain the importance of such types of after school organizations in Reykjavik, and also to maintain the work of recreation personnel, who puts a lot of efforts for making children's staying in leisure centres comfortable and enjoyable.

Findings of this study show that leisure-time centres in Iceland are essential elements in children's lives of Icelandic origin and non-Icelandic origin, Icelandic parents' and immigrant parents' lives, children with special needs and people working in such organizations. My work experience in after school centre helped me to reveal strong and weak sides of leisure-time organizations in Reykjavik, so this study can be useful for future research in this field.

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1 Introduction

Leisure-time centres are broad and inspiringly interesting field. I think these programs are vital part of social life for children. During school time young students have to learn diverse knowledge to acknowledge the world and also to build their future carrier with those knowledge and skills. But it is undoubtedly important to get good social skills, which can lead them to happy and worthy life.

Leisure is essential part of child development. Through different games children exercise diverse skills such as social skills, sport skills, acknowledge environment and develop personal perception and self-discovery. According to Vandell (1999), parents are trying to find high-quality child care services, where children can enjoy their free time after school because usually parents have longer work day than children, so they have to arrange care for the children. Parents can arrange other types of organized activities, such as piano lesson, gymnastics, football and some others, or hire babysitters, change work schedules, or even let children to take care of themselves at home. But parents in such conditions can worry about lack of opportunities for child's social growth and safety in whole. That's why afterschool care centres give good opportunities for safe and active leisure after school.

The comfortable staying for children depends on leisure-workers' creativeness and skills. So their aim is to develop and broad children's skills and imagination that help them to have enjoyable time. Therefore, this kind of work should select people with good creative abilities, but there is shortage of people. In whole such places are wonderfully warm and cosy, children feel there like at home. Emphases are on safety staying and providing a good service for both children and parents.

1.1 My experience in after school program in Russia

When I remember my own after-school care programme as a child in Russia in the 1995-1996 years, I think that it could be better than just having lunch and making my homework, I would like to have diverse activities, which can make afterschool programme more meaningful and enjoyable for me and my classmates.

The reason why I attended Russian afterschool care program was simple – my mother was busy with her work and my younger sister, so I think many parents in my school had the same type of problem. In Russia most of after school programs operated by schools

(Lokshin, 1999). In my school participants of after school program were 6-9 years old, I attended the program for 1 year, after that I have started dance and piano lessons as many of my classmates. During afterschool care program students are supposed to have outside play for 40-50 minutes, then to eat lunch, after that to have some rest, in another words, to sleep in a specially equipped room for it, and finally to do the homework. In 1990s after Soviet Union collapse after school care centres were offered to working families and especially for single-mothers and low-income families, who didn't have opportunity to take care of the children after school. Government supported such programs and mostly there were free-of -charge child care facilities (Lokshin, 1999).

1.2 About leisure-time centres in Reykjavik

After-school programs have diverse aims and tasks, but the main one is that all of them are united for one special goal – to make children happy and free in their choices what to do after school. For the children age 6-9 leisure education should be fun and pleasure. Leisure learning can be integrating through diverse activities that can be interesting for children.

As Palsdottir (2012) mentioned in her study, from 2002 year “Reykjavik City authorities set out to make after-school centres” (Palsdottir, 2012, p.124) for not only care purposes, but also for organizing diverse leisure activities. The structure of leisure-time centres in Reykjavik is quite simple, but full of diverse activities, events and entertainments for children. Particularly, I would like to describe the day schedule of Brosbaer, where I have used to work. Brosbaer is located in district Grafarvogur in the north part of Reykjavik, and this leisure-time centre works in conjunction with Vaetaskoli (early named Engjaskoli). The amount of children varies on different factors, such as parents' solvency, children' desire to participate leisure-time activities and the amount of children, who attend primary school. In Brosbaer in different years (2010-2014), the number of children were approximately the same, 50-60 children. In other centres this number can be varied also because of amount of children in primary classes and specious accommodations.

According to the “*City Council agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavik*” (Palsdottir, 2012, p.124), leisure-time centres start their work straight after school at 13.30 and end up the work at 17.15. During holidays leisure-time centres open the whole day and parents have to pay extra fee.

Recreation personnel should meet children after school and accompany them to the centre. After that children go to play for 30-40 minutes outside or stay inside, depends on the weather. Later at 14.00 children have snack time, the time for snack is around 30

minutes, then from 14.30-15.30 leisure-workers provides specific activities and clubs according to ready schedule for the week. From 15.30 -16.00 is quite time, when children can read books, play table games or do some quite activities. At 16.00 o'clock is fruit time, when leisure-workers and children eat fruits together and talk on various topics. According to Palsdottir (2012) study, in Nordic countries the pedagogue in after-school care centres arrange a special "fruit-time", when children and leisure-workers sit together and eat fruits, and the aim of this is to strength connection between children and leisure-workers. But children are not happy about the fact that they are forced to sit with adults and interrupt their play. In Brosbaer and some others centres I have chance to observe reconstruction of this activity. As I mentioned before in Brosbaer children eat fruits with leisure-workers and discuss some interesting topics or leisure-workers offer some contests or games to get the fruits. So it turns to an engaging and enjoyable activity for both leisure-workers and children. After that is home time or free time play for those children who stay longer.

The day schedule for different leisure-time centres in Iceland can be different, it depends specifically on leaders and leisure-workers (as it was in Brosbaer). Recreation centres have some training for leaders and leisure-time workers, where they build clear conception of activities that should be provided in leisure-time centres. Recreation centres were bounded with schools till June 2002 (Reykjavik, 2002a), after that the policy of after-school care centres has changed and as Palsdottir (2012) pointed out in her study, the name *school-day-care* has changed to *leisure-time centre*, which emphasize the importance of leisure rather than care or learning. Palsdottir (2012) mentioned in her study that "*A Contract about the management of after-school centres in schools was made between the SRC and the Educational Council concerning the operation of after-school centres in schools (Reykjavík, 2002b, updated in 2006)*" (p.124). So, it means that the official collaboration between schools and leisure-time centres was concluded.

In Icelandic leisure-time centre students are not supposed to do their homework if compare to Russian afterschool care centres. That's why the structure of such centres in Russia is quite simple and directed on the main needs of students, but not on leisure. In general, the priority for such centres is education and physical health. But till nowadays after school care centres in Russia were free of charge, but now parents have to some fee for the programs. The fee is different and depends on decision of local authorities.

But now I have got a great experience in Iceland, where I have been working in this field for four years. That experience opened for me different way of how afterschool programme can be fun and pleasure for children and also for those who works in this

field. Collaboration of children and staff-workers make the process fulfil and useful. Children get to know new creative things and workers are passionate about what they are doing.

1.3 Purpose and significance of the study

“After school centres stress the development of social skills in interaction through play and work, as well as self-respect and respect towards others and one’s environment. The programmes seek to implement democratic work procedures, increasing children’s ability to form independent views and impact their environment and circumstances. Serving children with special needs is organised separately by each after-school programme in cooperation with parents, school and experts.” (After school centres, Reykjavik, n.d.)

Also I would like to mention the importance such centres for immigrant children, because they really need social support and as my experience showed that leisure-time centres can help children to assimilate into the new culture. Personally, I have decided to write about after leisure-time centres, because as I mentioned before I have been working there for 4 years and I found this work so inspiring and useful, because all leisure-workers truly liked the work. Every leisure-worker tried to bring something interesting and positive to children, and the most important thing that I discovered was that the children wanted to spend their time in our leisure-time centre. So I have got a great and useful experience that I will use in my future work. I have been working in compulsory school in Reykjavik, with children from 1-4 grades, ages 6 to 9-years-old. We had children of other nationalities and countries as well as children with special needs. So, the leisure-workers in such field have to be enough educated and have an idea what she/he can bring useful to the children.

I would like to look deeper in the structure of the leisure-centre activities and emphasize how this kind of leisure is undoubtedly important in children’s life. To do this I will both look at the relevant literature and research on the importance of various leisure activities that are offered in leisure-time centres. I will also discuss how the leisure-time centre that I worked on in Reykjavik was organized and build on my experience. I will also look at the role of the leisure workers. Finally, I will explore why leisure-time centres are important for children of immigrants and how leisure-time centres support social-and emotional development of children.

2 Theoretical framework and personal experience of the study

2.1 Activities

From the psychological view it is necessary for children to change school atmosphere with more rigorous discipline to leisure and fun. Children have to turn their minds from study to another kind of “science”- social relationships and diverse creations. After school activities is a good opportunity for children to discover their hidden abilities. If the work in centre is full of different activities and clubs, there will be more opportunities for children to choose what they really like or some new things, which they will like to do.

“Two specific aspects of leisure education/literacy in need of immediate attention are unstructured play and connecting with nature. Parents, teachers, youth leaders, and recreation providers must all become educated about the value of play and of nature, and their respective roles in ensuring that children have the means required (literacy) to reap the benefits of play in both built and natural environments (e.g., confidence to be creative, respect for others, ability to play cooperatively, knowledge of plants and animals, basic survival skills, respect for nature).” (Recreation Nova Scotia; Response Paper, 2013)

Mahoney, Larson and Eccles (2005) argued the following:

“during childhood, key developmental tasks in our society include (a) acquiring habits of psychical and psychological health, (b) forming a positive orientation toward school and achievement, (c) getting along with others including peers and adults, and (d) acquiring appropriate value systems about rules and conduct across different contexts (p.6).”

Diverse activities such as enrichment lessons (computer clubs, sport activities, outdoor activities), clubs (Boys and Girls clubs, handmade clubs, painting), organized celebrations, and individual training and tutoring, are playing a crucial part in afterschool care programs in Western countries (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005). Such activities are useful and develop different skills. Often parents send their children to various sections, which can have different specialization. It is usually 2-3 days per week, and children get some knowledge and skills in music, sport, drawing and etc. However, the main emphasis for leisure-time centres in Reykjavik are directed on social skills and friendship. Children learn how to communicate with peers in a positive way with tutors` support. From my experience I have noticed that children feel tiredness after school lessons, but when a person changes activity it will give him new wave of energy. Children always open to something new and participate in diverse activities with pleasure. As Peterson (2014) points out that not all leisure activities that provided in afterschool care centres can be

valued equally. According to her research, “high yield” or another words highly productive activities produce better outcome for children, especially for elder children, because it leads to independency, so child has control and initiative is coming from him/herself. And it’s very important, because it means that child can make his/her own choice without looking to what other people doing. Afterschool leisure time should help children to relax after school routine and fully enjoy their childhood.

There are many interesting and useful activities that leisure-time centre can offer. In this section I will discuss a few of them, namely sports, out-door activity, arts and craft, literacy in general, computers, clubs, organized games and free play.

2.1.1 Sports

The most popular activity among children in Brosbaer is sport activity. This kind of activity doesn’t have a gender barrier, it means that boys and girls like it equally. According to age group and gender peculiar properties there could be presented different physical activities such as football, basketball, table tennis and various active games. Physical activities in after school programs are directed to general development. Also such activities make good influence on children’s physical and mental conditions. According to Trost, Rosenkranz and Dzewaltowski (2007) after-school centres potentially are ready to provide some structured or unstructured physical activities and “teaching students behavioural and movement skills associated with lifelong participation in physical activity” (p.623). They assume that sport activities can not only prevent health problems in future, but also to develop leader qualities, self-esteem and positive attitude to sport.

So, it is necessary to pay attention to collaborative group work, where children can learn how to behave in different situations. Team play is essential part of physical activity. When children know how to behave in group in informal play, they can learn and remember the right behaviour in formal situation with less efforts and negative perception. My observation helped me to understand that children in primary school prefer to play with their leisure-workers, they are taking example of their manner to play and lead the game. They copy a leisure-worker, so it is important to show a good example of an interesting play and also positive attitude to everyone.

According to age group (6-9 years), sport activities can help to develop positive attitude to school and peers, as physical as psychological health, forming interpersonal skills, understanding of diverse rule systems and accepting them as necessity, forming self-discipline and active lifestyle. (Trost, Rosenkranz and Dzewaltowski, 2007).

2.1.2 Outdoor activity

Another activity form is closely bounded with sport activity. This activity is outdoor activity. There is no wonder that children adore to play in the open air, especially if the weather is appropriate. But in Iceland the good weather is very rare, so children get used to wind, rain, or snow. So, north people have “good” weather every season, they teach their children that fun can be in any weather, the main thing is yourself and the group of friends that you have. Observing children of primary school age, I have noticed that playing outside they feel freedom and opportunity to be close to the nature. Some of them prefer active games or football, others like to play in hide-and-seek or jump on the rope, but quite children are interested in collecting beautiful stones or simply ride on swing. It means that every child can find what to do outside. Outdoor activities are part and parcel of full and healthy life. In modern society children from kindergarten age start to use electronic devices with unhealthy interest and prefer to spend the whole day in front of computer or tablets. So, if parents and teachers will control the use of diverse electronic devices, then society will have energetic and active citizens.

Psychical inactivity can lead to serious health problems such as obesity, heart diseases, diabetes and etc. According to data Iceland is among countries with the most overweight population, 21% of Icelanders have obesity and 61% are overweight (Gudmundur, 2015). Of course, formally, leisure-time centres do not have take the responsibility for overweight children, but it would be helpful if leisure-workers can provide different outside activities that can increase interest to physical activities in general.

2.1.3 Arts and crafts

The next type of activity is creative activity that could be divided in some branches such crafts, painting or modelling, and knitting. According to my observation, this type of activity especially popular among girls, but some boys are also can have interest in it. Art and craft are very useful in developing different qualities and also in discovering hidden talents in students. As Craft (2001) emphasizes the need of development of universal creativity in children, she also claims that it's truly important to support child's ideas in creativity, because children enjoy to solve diverse creative problems and enjoy experimenting with new ideas. So with these forms of activities children can develop their abilities in fine motor skills, solving complicated problems, and to reveal their creative potential, argues Eisner (1984). Striving for a harmonious upbringing of the child, you need to take care of the development of his aesthetic sensitivity, the fact that he/she was able to use his/her life experiences and activities derived from dialogue with art.

From early childhood, a child is brought up the ability to perceive, feel, and understand beauty, the desire to participate in the creation of beauty. Joining folk art activities, child produced a certain attitude to nature, work, social life, family life. Part of Aesthetic Education is the art education, carried out by means of art, argues Alexeeva et al. (2011).

In Brosbaer creative activities are very popular among all children. They are open to create something new and with pleasure participate in many activities that recreation personnel would offer. Every day children can make by hand different things, such as bracelets from thread, different thing from plastic pearls, knit simple scarfs, paint, make cards and etc. On special events such as National holidays, leisure-workers organize baking activity or dance party for children.

2.1.4 Literacy

In leisure-time centres in Iceland children are always welcome to read. In the policy for afterschool centres in Reykjavik, they do not provide homework and leisure-workers don't have to specifically develop reading skills. Still, books are always available because children with pleasure read stories and fairy tales. The variety of child's literature is rich, so any child can find literature for his taste. Usually afterschool centres are located in school buildings, it means that school workers and tutors in afterschool care centres have close connection. School library in Engjaskoli (Brosbaer) is always open for students till 17 o'clock, and during 4 hours after school activities reading also takes part.

Literary reading affects not only the individual child's mental processes such as memory, thinking, imagination, emotion, and his personality in whole. According to *Icelandic Pillars of Education* (2011) literacy is very important part of student's education:

"The main objective of literacy is for pupils to become active participants in transforming and rewriting the world by creating their own meaning and responding in a personal and creative manner to what they read with the aid of the media and technology that is available. (p.17). For afterschool programs in Reykjavik there is no aim to teach children literacy, but any support in developing reading skills in a positive way will increase amount of "reading" children."

In 21st century both parents are busy with their work and home problems, sometimes they don't have much time to read books for children. In school children get a lot of different information and excessive reading can lead to high fatigability. So after school reading should be unobtrusive and engaging for children. It is truly helpful when tutors can encourage children to read or even read for them, it will increase interest in reading.

Famous Russian teacher Makarenko (1936) attached great importance to the development of a child's imagination with the help of viewing illustrations. According to his study, looking at pictures, many children ask questions and try to find out the details. They are especially fond of fairy tales. After all, in every fairy tale there is an element of reality. The period when children like stories is very important for the formation of the child's feelings. That's why reading books and especially fairy tales is without a doubt important element of in afterschool care program.

2.1.5 Computers

Today computer technologies are playing crucial part in individual's life. In the conditions of modern social development and production it is impossible to imagine a world without information resources. Modern information space requires computer skills not only in middle school, but also in primary schools. Informational computer technologies can not only give a child highly selected and properly organized knowledges, but also to develop intellectual, creative abilities, and to develop the ability to independently acquire new knowledge, according to *Icelandic Pillars of Education* (2011). So in leisure-time centres computer classes take place twice a week because children show high interest in playing computer games collaboratively. Leisure-workers always observes game selection and help children to find the most appropriate computer games according child's interests and age. There are also some restrictions for children such as only one hour for this activity twice a week because misuse of computer interest can lead to unnatural addiction. Paik (2001) discussed the problem of displacement other social activities because of internet addiction. If parents do not control usage of electronic devices, it will lead to decline of real communication with friends, reduction of sport activities, late time for sleeping and psychological addiction of the internet tools. So, leisure-time centres may provide limited time for computer activities, which can prevent negative effects of using internet technologies.

2.1.6 Organized games

The game is the type of children's activity, which develops child as a person, forms his aspects of psyche from which later will depend his successes in educational and future work, his relationship with people (Eccles,2005). There are many types of games that can help children to develop mental, social and other skills. First of all, leisure-workers take into account the wishes of children, but also give preference to developing games. In my opinion some card games, active games are engaging children into collaborative play. It is crucial to involve many children at the same time for playing cooperative game, where

each child can show his abilities and develop diverse skills. But from my experience, I have realized that it is also important to know each child personally, to know his strong and weak sides and personality in whole. It's a fact that children like active games, where they can release their energy and at the same time learn how to play faithfully with each other. So leisure-worker's role is to help children to find "right" games and to engage them. Usually, children with pleasure participate in different activities, and also they prefer to play with tutor who is authority and friend for them simultaneously.

Different age of group children requires different games and activities for them. In Brosbaer children of 5-7 years old prefer to play with leisure-workers and expect from them efficiency and participation. Elder children, 8-9 years old according to their psychological development prefer to play separately from their younger peers and rarely with tutor. And sometimes because of such division can arise conflict situation, when younger children want to play together with older children or there can be conflicts which children bring along from school. Leisure-time teacher's aims are to prevent these conflicts or to try to discuss the problems and offenses individually.

2.1.7 Clubs

Clubs are offered in the leisure-time centres in Reykjavik to give children choice of activity. According to Peterson (2014) study the importance of choice is essential element of leisure. The power of choice gives children the opportunity to control their leisure, because activities that children usually select are directed on enjoyment and satisfaction that come out of activity. Peterson (2014) claims that freedom to select activity doesn't mean that person have suitable knowledge or skills for the activity, but "this is the vital role of leisure education, preparing them with the attitudes, knowledge and tools to assess their individual leisure needs and plan for activities that satisfy and shape their leisure identity" (p.4).

There are also other forms of activities during holiday's time like special clubs such as baking club, art club (making Christmas cards or Halloween masks and etc.). In holidays children are visiting different outside activities such as skiing, bowling or cinema.

2.1.8 Free play

And finally, I would like to tell about free time play, the most important type activity in leisure-time centres. It is one of the most enjoyable parts of being in afterschool care centre for children. After whole day of sitting in the classroom and getting knowledge, children need to have some free time, where they can play with peers and have some different field of work. Young students have the need of socialization without school

pressure on them. After school they fall into different atmosphere, where all children feel comfortable and can be easily engaged to diverse activities or just free play.

Palsdottir (2012) indicates in her research that play is important part in child's life.

According to her study and my experience children associate school with *learning*, but leisure-time centre with *play*. So for them after school centre is the place, where children can enjoy free play. They are glad opportunity of vary activities such as colouring, playing cards, playing with constructions (particularly, Lego construction). Girls with pleasure play with dolls and kitchen, boys prefer to play with trains and cars. So, children choose what activity is interesting for them in the concrete moment and they always can change their choice and to do something else. But of course, there are some unpleasant moments for children that they cannot avoid being in leisure-centre. In Brosbaer and other leisure-time centres, free choice is always accompanied with the choice of leisure-workers, because they usually decide what types of free play will be during the day. And sometimes children do not know what to choose because of lack of the play that they like. The other negative point that I experienced working in leisure-time centres is that some children cannot stay in noisy atmosphere and feel very annoyed and stressed because of it. Those children do not want to play, while others enjoy that noisy and "loud" atmosphere. So for "silent children" leisure-workers try to find some other place in school. Particularly, in Brosbaer, children could take any toys that they like and stay with one or two leisure-workers in library or dance hall. The weather conditions in Iceland are not so pleasant, so children do not appreciate, when leisure-workers offer them outside free play. In Brosbaer decisions about outside play usually depended on leader, some leaders wanted children to play outside despite of any weather conditions, but some were more democratic and ask children if they really want to be outside.

In general, free play in Brosbaer associated for children with fun, pleasure and opportunity of choice.

2.2 Recreation personnel

According to Rhodes (2004) a quality of relationship between program staff and children has direct impact on the developmental benefits that children receive. It makes more results when supportive and friendly attitude from leisure-workers to participants (children) is a priority for staff. Also providing high-quality communication skills of personnel refine cognitive skills of children "through meaningful conversation" (Rhodes, 2004).

People who are searching work in this field have many challenges. There is not enough investment from the government, and working conditions are not quite good and poor acceptable. Some researches (Palsdottir, 2014) show that there is a little percentage of individuals who want to work in after school care centres. It is a part time job, so mostly students from universities want to be a part of this organization. In my opinion this work is crucial for students who study educational programs, it can be practical and useful experiences for their future career. But in whole situation is that not professional pedagogues work in afterschool care centres. In Iceland the teaching of recreation studies began only 15 years ago. So, it means that this is new field compare to emergence of profession. There is no traditional way of recreational pedagogy in Iceland. Palsdottir (2012) mentioned in her study that:

“a report about after-school services in the European Union shows that the qualifications and training of personnel in after-school programs varies (EFILWC, 2006). There is a range of job titles used for after-school personnel, for example *child minder*, *after-school service teacher*, *nanny*, *social worker*, and *leisure-time teacher*, to name a few (EFILWC, 2006).” (p. 29)

As an example, in Brosbaer, where I worked, children associated personnel with teachers and sometimes they called leisure-workers kennari (from Icelandic means teacher), because there is no specific name for leisure-time teacher. To be a worker in this field is very responsible and it requires many skills. As was mentioned before there are not so many qualified workers who have education in pedagogue because of lack of competitive salary and lack of perspective in future in this field.

2.2.1 Duties of personnel

Leisure-workers have many vary duties that they need to provide during their work day. Particularly, in Brosbaer, in these duties are included meeting children after school (sometimes after school care centres are not in school buildings, that's why staff workers need to pick them up after school), preparing twice meal for children (two types of snack, where first one should be served at 14.00 o'clock, and second one, fruit snack, should be served after 16.00 o'clock), cooperate with school services (collection information about absent students and other issues), and also have to “implementing policies to keep the children safe and healthy; facilitating free play; teaching school subjects, sports, arts and crafts; keeping children amused; relating to children in groups and as individuals; carrying out equal opportunity policies” (Petrie, 1994, as cited in Petrie et al., 2000, p. 55), (as cited in Palsdottir, 2012, p.31).

The main objectives for leisure-workers are to provide qualitative services in work with children. As Rhodes (2004) indicates in his work that positive interaction between leisure-worker and individual child, is building social and intellectual climate of the program. So, it is very important to spend some time with each child, to talk with him/her or in some cases to serve individual psychological problems. Children need individual attention, especially after school, where they spend the whole day and get a lot of information. Leisure-time centre is the place, where children can be socialized with their peers. So, each leisure-worker tries to engage every child in specially created social environment. This should be an ideal pattern, but the reality is different. The lack of personnel and large amount of children make leisure-workers' job very complicated. In Brosbaer every year attends around 60 children, around 50 per day and just 9 workers, 7-8 per day that is not enough to maximum pay attention to every child. As a real example when it was the most difficult time for leisure-workers at my place, when for few days, when other staff workers were ill, we had only 4 people for approximately 50 children. These days are real disaster for everyone. It makes work less pleasant and exhausting for leisure-workers. Children become out of control and all the aims that are set for the day can be easily ruined. So, the lack of personnel is unsolved problem, which can lead negative effects as on leisure-workers as on children. But Reykjavik has policy on this, and it indicates that there should be 15 children per leisure-worker. Having experience in this field, I totally disagree with this number as well as my colleagues. If compare to school, when teacher may have class of 22 children and control them strictly according to school rules, leisure-workers do not have such strict attitude to children and especially during free play time, when children are free to choose the activity, leisure-workers have to be responsible for all participants, which is quite difficult.

The essential part of leisure-worker's responsibility is providing safe and positive staying in after-school care centre. Workers are responsible for each child, so to avoid some problems, leisure-workers should have constant conversation with children about discipline and behaviour in the centre. As was mentioned before the amount of leisure-workers is very low and the amount of children can be too high, so sometimes leisure-workers has to create activities that can involve as many participants as it possible.

Pedagogical issue in this program is an essential part of this field. Workers supposed to make friendly atmosphere and psychological comfortable conditions for children. But sometimes it is impossible to avoid conflicts among children, so leisure-time workers have to be responsible for solving conflict situations in an appropriate way. And conversations

are the most important part in work with children, which can enhance children's social skills (Peterson, 2014).

Sometimes children do not feel satisfied with choice of leisure-workers about specific types of activities because of some reasons of private character, and a ground of conflict can appear. Another type of conflict situation when children cannot share toys or don't want to accept a child to their play. In that cases are necessary to solve the conflict immediately and to explain children the importance of joint play. Each conflict has to be analysed in details, and depending on conditions, the conflict should be solved demonstratively in front of all children or individually.

After school young students have the need of communication with their peers or sometimes with the leisure-worker. Conversation with the children is essential part of qualitative work of professionals. But the practice shows that not only lack of the time is the reason of less individual "conversational practice" with the children, but also lack of knowledge in psychology. In my opinion personal qualities and knowing of psychology is very important in this work, even if this knowledge a person gets on his/her own. Conflict situations that leisure-workers need to solve can have different nature such as child's bad mood, conflicts between children that happened during school time and weren't solved by teacher, or conflicts that happened inside centre. Older children need no less attention than younger children, their world view is more formed and they have their own model of behaviour and principles.

2.2.2 Cooperation with parents

Face-to-face meeting with parents is also part of duties that lay on leisure-workers. Parents can have different representations about program and schedule that afterschool care centres offer. Some parents are more interested in centre's daily routine, others less care, thinking that the main point is that their children in safe place and satisfied situation in whole. But for leisure-worker is essential to know enough information about children's families. The inner situation in family has a crucial impact on child's cognition and development. There could be different families with diverse traditions and different family compositions. Some children are growing without parents, or with one parent and teachers should also pay attention to such important factors. Leisure-workers' goals are to make a framework about each student, to have full information about different sides of child's family life and conditions. Only if leisure-workers are informed enough about child's life, they can draw a full picture about ways and methods how to find right and appropriate solutions for children according their specific situation, of course, with a

great help of parents. Mutual work between leisure-workers and parents gives diverse opportunities and development for every child.

The other side is collaboration with parents. As Fashola (2002) mentioned that the success of afterschool centres depends on reputation that staff make on parents. So, there are some key moments between leisure-workers and parents such as trust, mutual respect and positive attitude to the afterschool care centre in general. "A quality after school program should embrace collaboration as a central mode of operating, foster a climate which aims to build trust amongst parents, and invoke a welcoming climate for parents" (Lindsey, 2010, p.25).

2.2.3 Administration and trainings

In fact, recreation personnel don't exist separately from the centre offices. Each area has one main Recreation Centre, which unites all afterschool care centres in that zone. For instance, in Grafarvogur area the main Recreation Centre is Gufunesbaer, where all afterschool centres hold meetings with leisure-workers and leaders. Meetings are always hold for new coming personnel in autumn, where leaders explain "safety rules, child development, and the arrangement of recreational activities for children" (K. Palsdottir, 2012, p.126). Also meetings can be organized several times in year, where leisure-workers and leaders exchange ideas about improvement of organization of the program or various projects can be introduced, which were jointly organized by leisure-workers and leaders of few or more centres. These meetings are very important for creating new ideas, exchanging experiences and also for supporting work of leisure-workers and leaders.

2.3 Problematic issues in leisure-time centres in Reykjavik

As was mentioned earlier (see Introduction chapter), before 2002 leisure-time centres were operated by schools, but after "*City Council's agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavik*" (Palsdottir, 2012, p.117) were given to Recreation Centres, so schools and leisure-time centres have formal agreement for cooperation. The connection between school services and afterschool care programs can be positive and improve quality of provided services from both sides, but, of course, some difficulties are unavoidable. Schools have their own budgets from government, afterschool care centres also have maintenance from the government, but partly. Parents have to pay for their children being in afterschool care program. The payment is not very high, and parents who have 2 or more children get discounts, but still not every parent have opportunity to bring the child to this program because of financial situation. Some parents have low-income, so their children are forced to miss the opportunity to have leisure time with

their peers. In my practice I had some examples that emphasize the importance of being in the afterschool care program for all students who really needs it. It's really important that students in primary school shouldn't stay alone after school, but afterschool care centres don't have responsibility for those students who are left after school. Once I observed the situation, when a child didn't go home after school, but she was waiting for her parents sitting on the stairs for almost 3 hours, and this situation wasn't isolated case. From my point of view this situation is totally unacceptable, but the main responsibilities are on parents for the child in this situation. But it doesn't mean that school is not responsible for such situations. There have to be solutions and policies that can help to regulate and control child's location after school.

Another problem is that not all schools in Reykjavik have enough space for after-school care programs. Usually after-school care centres are located inside school buildings, some of them have separate buildings. On my practice I worked in place with not big room to accommodate 50 children, that is why leisure-workers were trying to find more space in school, where can be possible to divide children according to their age and give them more space to play. It is necessary to have good connections with school personnel, especially when not easy issues can be raised. We solved this problem defending our right to accommodate children properly, explaining impossibility of staying so many children in one room.

As K. Palsdottir (2012) mentioned in her research, that most of the recreation personnel in Iceland do not have specific education or training for work in afterschool care centres, but despite of lack of education, leisure-workers understand the potential importance of their work. The problem is in leisure-workers' not belonging to the educational system, they do not consider themselves as specialist in the pedagogical field and therefore, they do not think that their work is valuable enough. So, the importance of specialists in this field is essential and leaders of afterschool care organizations should pay attention to needs and problems of leisure-workers, and also the opportunity of constant development in this field.

2.4 Children of immigrants or language barrier

According to Statistics of Iceland 8,9 % of the population are immigrants (Statistics, Iceland 2015). In Icelandic schools are not small amount of children from different countries. All they have their own religion, language, traditions and culture. During their school days they meet a lot of difficulties concerning not only language barrier, but some national and cultural differences. *According to Heath (2005) people are not born with*

identities or believes, our identities are external sides of our life that depends on world, nationality, community and family environments. Also the crucial part for immigrant children plays surrounding, and huge part of it takes school. School is a place, where young people get knowledge, make friends, and create social life in school frames. Especially if to think about students who has come to another country because of different reasons and who truly needs support and countenance from the teacher and other students. The reality is not always pleasant, young students can be cruel to newcomers. So teacher's role should be more various in this case. But the fact is that parents want their children to be more socialized in new place, that's why they prefer to leave their children in after-school care centres, where children can practise Icelandic and also to find some friends. The responsibility that lays on leisure-workers is weighty. As an adaptation period is difficult and sometimes painful process, leisure-workers have to with maximum make the most appropriate conditions for such students, they should be treated equally with other students.

The other important aspect is that immigrant parents are not well-informed about activities in school, different programs and curricula in general, argues Ragnarsdottir (2007). And also findings showed that parents would like to have more information about school materials and instructions in whole. According to Chen (2013) research, especially single-parents worry about their children's educational and social achievements. Chen (2013) indicated that for immigrant children percentage of discrimination is high, children cannot avoid teasing, bullying or other negative attitude from their classmates, exceptions are only children who were born in Iceland and they made some friends in preschool. Portes (1999) indicates that for children such discrimination, which immigrant children perceive in school, can lead not only to educational problems, but also can make negative effect on complex of psychosocial variables that maintain school adaptation. Knowing Icelandic language is valuable criteria, because student's abilities is measured by the knowledge of Icelandic, claims Ragnarsdottir (2007). It means that children need school support, otherwise they will not achieve that progress in education and in social life, which is required for wellbeing. So afterschool care programs can offer great opportunity to children of immigrants to practice Icelandic in informal environment, to build strong social connections with peers and to feel themselves the part of Icelandic society. Leisure-time centres are focused on social life of children after school, so when children in school focus more on educational achievements, in afterschool leisure centres they have time to do what is really interesting for them. Joint actions bring children together, so leisure-workers should find out what is really interesting for immigrant children, and to provide

activities that can be interesting as for non-Icelandic children as well for Icelandic. As was mentioned in *Activity* chapter, afterschool programs in Reykjavik are not focused on educational moments, but mostly on social and leisure moments. So, non-Icelandic children can enjoy their staying in leisure-time centre and make friendship with Icelandic children or other immigrants. Leisure-workers should support and encourage non-Icelandic children to participate in activities and to make friendly and positive atmosphere for everyone.

In place, where I worked, children got used to share Icelandic traditions and celebrations. But it is also accepted if non-Icelandic children want to share some traditions of their country. Therefore, children are not feeling themselves as outcomes or “foreigners” in a bad meaning. So it is very important to keep friendly staying for children.

2.5 Children with special needs

“The exclusion of children from school on the grounds of ‘amoral’ and ‘illness’ as stipulated in the Education Act 1936 was annulled by the passing of the Education Act 1974 when the right of education was extended to all children and the concept of integration was introduced” (Marinoson & Bjarnason, 2011, p. 5). Historically, after-school programs were poor-equipped and didn’t want to accept students with special needs, because it would require a lot of attention to children’s needs and lack of resources, finance and specialists can make the work of leisure-workers too difficult (Griffin, 2008). Today, children with special needs participate in regular compulsory schools, it means that they also visit after-school care centres. To work with children is not an easy job, but to work with disabled children is much harder. A worker has to be well educated and with all his heart to love children and to be devoted to this profession. Mostly leisure-workers don’t have a special education in this field, but in my practice we had few children with special needs, who had ADHD and Asperger syndrome (which is part of a group of conditions called autism spectrum disorders). Work with those children requires broad knowledge and skills in this field. In some cases, even not every person, who has education in this field can really work with mentally disabled. So, the importance of specialists in different fields of psychology is crucial. It is no doubt that such children need to have a qualified specialist with them, but from the other hand if a specialist doesn’t have personal qualities, which are required to this specific profession, then that specialist will not get need results. So, leisure-workers in leisure centres work with children who have mental diseases, but it would be more helpful if an educated specialist work in after-school care centres, or at least there should be some training courses for all leisure-workers to know better how to work with these children. But if to look at the

jurisdictional point the situation in Iceland is ambiguous, Marinsson and Bjarnason (2011) found the following:

Special educators still function in mainstream schools at three school levels, although their professional status is no longer recognised by law or regulation. In other words, “the terms special education and special educator are mentioned neither in Icelandic law, ordinances nor the National Curriculum Guides for the pre-primary, primary or secondary sectors of the school system. Nor are they mentioned in a recent policy document on educational provision by the largest municipality, the City of Reykjavík. Instead the term ‘special support’ is used. (p.1-4.).

But what is really important that children with some mental or physical disabilities can have chance to socialize with their non-disabled peers and participate in many activities and leisure that their healthy peers. So, afterschool programs give the opportunity for “special” children to play, succeed and simply have fun “side-by-side with children of all abilities” (Griffin, 2008, p.5).

2.6 Children as participants

The place where children spend their time after school is different from both school and home. As Palsdottir(2012) indicated in her work that, statistics shows that children like visiting after-school care centres (Petrie et al., 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002). The main argument why they like to attend leisure centres is the opportunity to meet their friends and possibility to make new. It is really important for children of age 6-9 to spend time with friends, because parents may not have free time every day to let children visit their friends. Leisure-time centres provide this necessary social requirement. Also children are glad the opportunity of free play with less interference of adults. Of course, it doesn't mean that children can play without adults' control, but the fact of less intervention makes the being in after-school care centre more positive for them. Children should have time of free play, where they can be independent and self-sustained in their choice.

Socialization for children 6-9 is really important, it is time when children start to consciously choose friends. The fact is that sociology of pre-adolescent children was ignored until recent times (Hill, 1996). There was child psychology, but there wasn't discipline comparable to it in sociology. In the beginning sociologists focused on different aspects of children in the family context, childhood was framed by adults (Dreitzel, 1973; James and Prout, 1990; Rogers, 1993), but then they started to explore status of children as separate social group (Qvortrup et al., 1994), and eventually to study children's own perspective (Mayall, 1994a). Mayall (1994, b) argues that “this contrasts with the

approaches in much developmental psychology which conceptualises children as lesser as adults, in that they are progressing towards the goal of mature adulthood" (p 2). All these means that there wasn't enough researches about child well-being and emotions in whole. According to Hill (1996), who made the research about emotions and well-being of primary-age children, adults should follow three main principles with children, "first one is to "stop" and think about children's opinion, second one is to "look" for children's feelings and emotions", and finally to "listen" what children say". (p.142) Children by their nature are very open and trustful, they need adults' attention more than adults usually give them. According to some researches older children prefer to share their anxiety and feelings with their peers, younger children still prefer to share their feelings mostly with adults. So, in work with children is very important to pay respect to their inner and external conditions. The activities that provided in the centres should develop diverse children's skills and abilities, and also to satisfy children's needs and interests.

The one of the main focuses of the program is to allow children discover what they really would like to do, to find truly interest in somethings that program can offer. The afterschool setting is meeting point for self-discovery in "a separate environment in which children can explore new skill areas, discover talents within themselves, and experience the thrill of doing something just because they love doing it" (Larner, Zippiroli, and Behrman 1999, p. 7). So, children appreciate the opportunity to make decisions about participating in different activities and to have free choices in organizing their own projects. Palsdottir (2102) study indicates that "the social-pedagogical nature of the work in the after-school centres in Iceland supports the children's sense of belonging in the institutional framework of schooling." (p.220) The reason why decision-making is so important is quite clear: children have a little opportunity to make decisions during school time, so in afterschool centres they have chance to express their ideas and to find leisure-workers' support in organizing activities that are truly interesting for children.

3 Conclusion

3.1 The importance of leisure-time centres in Reykjavik

The main purpose for after school activities is to make children smiling and happy. Also to open and develop their creative skills, to teach them how to cooperate with each other, to encourage self-esteem and just have a good time together after school. That is why school climate and atmosphere play a crucial role. Another important aim of leisure-time centres is to let parents to work with the knowing that their children are in safe. These centres provide essential service for community in a broad sense, because they render a service to working parents, who prefer to leave children in “safe hands” and be sure that quality of service is high.

It is understandable that program has some limitations and frames, but there are enough leisure activities that program can offer. The impact of the program on children is essential enough, because if program follows specific goals and strategies in spending leisure with benefit for children, then it will help children to develop social skills, self-expression and skill-development, self and other esteem and to prevent negative behaviours. As it was mentioned earlier (see Children as participants), they should be free in their choice of what to do during leisure time. There is always be a question of self-organization and adults’ control during afterschool leisure time, but adults shouldn’t forget that “close supervision took some creativity out of the play” (Riess, 1989, p.167).

3.2 Main achievements of the study

Childhood is unforgettable time when a child should enjoy school time, but also to have free time for interesting afterschool activities. There are many different after school care programs, some of them are directed to help young students in their homework, and some to enhance their social skills, develop creative abilities and simply make them joyful from having free time after school with their schoolmates.

Leisure-time centres in Reykjavik are very useful organizations for children of any nation, religion and abilities. Such centres allow children to spend their time with maxim use and fun. Childhood is an important time, when future adults can simply have fun and enjoy their unencumbered of difficulties life; children have some time after school to develop social skills, to learn how to join the group of peers out of school, how to find friends, even if they not so good speakers of Icelandic, and finally to have lots of fun in participating in diverse activities that afterschool care program can offer. All main activities that included in list of daily activities that afterschool centres offer, are very important and play essential part in child’s development in general.

Children learn how to interact positively with their peers, develop creative skills through diverse activities, esteem other opinions and choices and choose activities according to interests. As Palsdottir (2012) mentioned in her work about afterschool centres, that Nordic model of afterschool care centres is basically build on leisure, fun and having time with friends. And afterschool care centres in Reykjavik follow this conception.

Of course, such centres cannot replace free outside play or spending paly time at home, but these centres have aim of making children's free time meaningful, positive and well-organized, so children will not be bored and there always be something to do. But what important most of all is that children feel happy and enjoy participating afterschool care centres in Reykjavik, according to Palsdottir study (2012) and my experience.

To end up my work I want with words of Palsdottir (2012):

"Only by feeling capable and accepted do the children experience themselves as active members in the community of practice. It is vital for professionals working in children's services to look at the lives of children holistically and take into account their experiences within the after-school centre." (p.223)

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