

Mađunarodna interdisciplinarna naučno-stručna konferencija
International Interdisciplinary Scientific Conference

svakodnevni život deteta

everyday life of children

ZBORNIK RADOVA

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

22–23. novembar 2024.

Novi Sad

Visoka škola strukovnih studija za obrazovanje vaspitača Novi Sad
Fakultet za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti u Puli
Fakultet za obrazovne nauke, Štip
Udruženje vaspitača Vojvodine
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SVAKODNEVNI ŽIVOT DETETA

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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS**

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Novi Sad**

**Urednik:
Lada Marinković**

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REČ UREDNIKA

Treća međunarodna interdisciplinarna naučno stručna konferencija Svakodnevni život deteta održana je u Novom Sadu oktobra 2024. godine u organizaciji Visoke škole strukovnih studija za obrazovanje vaspitača Novi Sad, Fakulteta za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti u Puli, Fakulteta za obrazovne nauke u Štipu, Udruženja vaspitača Vojvodine i Pedagoškog društva Vojvodine.

Radovi u ovom Zborniku predstavljaju deo istraživačkih promišljanja obrazovnih stručnjaka različitih profila i nivoa iskustva u radu s decom i mladima, a koji su svoja usmena izlaganja sa konferencije proširili i prikazali kroz pregledne, stručne, istraživačke i teorijske radove.

Zajednička polazna tačka svima bila je promišljanje, posmatranje, beleženje i istraživanje svakodnevnog života dece, njihovih prilika za učenje i razvoj. Od opštih i širokih polazišta u promišljanju uticaja kulture, igre, učenja, participacije dece u obrazovnoj i vaspitnoj praksi, kontakta s prirodom kao važnim okruženjem za rast i razvoj, preko preispitivanja uticaja tehnologija i medija, do nekih relativno novih konteksta za obrazovanje kao što su strip i cirkus, do potrebe da se dodatno pomaže porodici i roditeljima u kreiranju boljih praksi u odnosu s decom. Sadržaji kojima se autori radova bave odražavaju sliku vremena i svakodnevnog iskustva dece, te upućuju čitaoca na potrebu za stalnim kritičkim odnosom prema svakodnevnom okruženju koje je značajno za omogućavanje ostvarenja dobrobiti kao jednog od važnih postulata obrazovnih politika, naročito kada je reč o ranom razvojnom periodu. S obzirom na to da je Dobrobit ove godine i postavljena kao radni podnaslov konferencije, o različitim načinima njene ostvarljivosti diskutuju i autori radova u Zborniku. U tome koliko njih beleži metode i načine njenog ostvarenja, koliko je onih koji promišljaju o uslovima i faktorima koje je potrebno dodatno razvijati ili obezbediti, a koliko je onih koji pod kritičku lupu stavljaju mogućnost njene realizacije u savremenom svetu, ogleda se kompleksnost tema svakodnevnog života i dobrobiti, kojima se ovde bavimo.

Nadamo će da će zapisi ovog zbornika poslužiti boljem razumevanja detinjstva i preduslova za zdrav razvoj i ostvarenje dobrobiti, pre svega u obrazovnom okruženju.

Dr Lada Marinković,
Novi Sad, novembar, 2024.

SNEŽANA STAVREVA VESELINOVSKA, ANICA JANKOVSKA
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WHY DO CHILDREN SPEND LESS TIME IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

The lives of children have radically changed over the past few years. Children have little free time. Their lives are structured, organized, and timed nearly to the minute. Today's children are less connected to the natural world than at any other time in history. No longer free time is spent outdoors, in the nature. A growing body of research has demonstrated that the natural world holds numerous benefits for children and adults. While it is still mysterious just how the mind, body and spirit gain from exposure to and experiences with nature, empirical evidence forces us to reexamine and rethink the lives of today's children. This natural connection has been replaced in various ways – greater interaction with the digital ('plugged-in') world, less unstructured outdoor play, and via growing urbanization. This decreased exposure to nature has consequences that we are just beginning to understand. Research across disciplines now suggests that this disconnect (both figurative and literal) has far-reaching consequences for the health and well-being of both individuals and the natural environment in which they act. Children are smarter, cooperative, happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors. In this paper we represent the results from research made on children from 3-7 years old age in kindergartens in urban and rural environment. Results are statistically processed from which the results obtained give us the conclusion about the connection of the children with the natural environment.

Keywords: children, nature, natural world, natural connection, kindergartens.

Introduction

In recent decades, the lifestyle of children has drastically changed. While previous generations spent a lot of time outdoors, today we observe a significant decline in the time children spend in nature. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's study "Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds," children and teens now spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes each day with entertainment media, significantly reducing the time available for outdoor activities. This shift towards increased screen time has contributed to a dramatic reduction in the amount of time children spend outdoors, which raises important questions, as it could affect both the physical and mental health of children.

The study highlights how technology, by enabling nearly constant media access, has fundamentally altered the daily routines of young people. Children today spend on average only about half as much time outdoors as they did 30 years ago. This change can have far-reaching consequences for their health and well-being and could even negatively impact their relationship with the environment and their willingness to protect it in the long term.¹

This paper aims to investigate the reasons for the decline in nature time among children and the possible consequences of this development. It will explore which social, technological, and cultural factors have contributed to this change and how these affect the health and well-

being of children. At the same time, the societal relevance of the topic will be highlighted, particularly in terms of how this development might influence the future of our society and the environment.

The goal of this paper is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the causes behind the decline in nature time among children and to shed light on the associated health and societal impacts. Furthermore, possible solutions will be discussed to counteract this development and to reconnect future generations with nature.

The paper is divided into six main parts. First, a historical comparison will be made to illustrate the changes in children's leisure behavior. Then, the main factors influencing the decline in nature time will be examined. This will be followed by an analysis of the consequences of this development and a discussion of possible countermeasures. Finally, the key findings will be summarized, and an outlook on possible future developments will be provided.

Historical Comparison

In the past, children often spent hours outdoors, engaging in various activities that fostered a deep connection with nature. They explored forests, climbed trees, built huts, and participated in spontaneous play with other children. These activities were essential for their physical, social, and cognitive development, and nature was an integral part of their daily lives. After school or on weekends, it was common for children to play outside, as there were few alternative leisure activities like television or video games. Life was more closely connected to nature, and children developed a strong bond with their natural surroundings.

However, over the past few decades, children's leisure behavior has fundamentally changed. The rise of television, followed by the advent of computers, smartphones, and tablets, has significantly increased the time children spend indoors. These electronic devices offer a variety of entertainment options that often replace outdoor time. This shift has led to a reduction in the time children spend in nature, contributing to various developmental challenges.

Urbanization has also played a crucial role in this transformation. As more families move to urban areas, children's access to natural spaces has become increasingly limited. Urban environments, characterized by high-density living and fewer green spaces, offer fewer opportunities for spontaneous nature experiences. Research highlighted by Futurity emphasizes that in these urban settings, physical and social barriers discourage outdoor play, particularly unsupervised or independent play, further reducing children's engagement with nature.

Additionally, social changes, including increased parental concerns about safety, have led to more cautious parenting practices. Parents, worried about traffic, crime, and other potential dangers, are less likely to allow their children to play outside unsupervised. This trend, combined with the growing structuring of children's time through organized extracurricular activities, has further reduced opportunities for free outdoor play. These developments have led to a significant decrease in direct contact with nature, and on average, children today spend much less time outdoors than they did a few decades ago. This historical comparison illustrates how the conditions and opportunities for children to engage with nature have changed dramatically, driven by complex social, technological, and cultural factors.

Factors Influencing the Decline in Nature Time

The decline in the time children spend in nature is the result of a complex interplay of various factors. One of the most significant influences is technological development. With the increasing prevalence of televisions, computers, smartphones, and video games, children's leisure

behavior has fundamentally changed. These technologies offer a variety of entertainment options that are mostly consumed indoors and require little physical activity. Children are spending more and more time in front of screens, which significantly reduces the time they could spend outdoors in nature. According to research by Dr. Rhonda Clements, children today spend considerably less time playing outdoors than their parents did, largely due to the rise of indoor entertainment like television and video games.

Another significant influence is urbanization and the associated safety concerns. As more children grow up in cities, access to natural spaces such as forests, parks, or gardens is often limited. In many urban areas, there are fewer safe and accessible greenspaces where children can play freely. Dr. Clements' study also notes that concerns about safety, including fears of crime accidents, have led parents to become more cautious, further reducing the time children spend outdoors unsupervised.

In addition, education and extracurricular activities play a decisive role. In recent decades, the pressure on children to succeed in school has increased significantly. This has led to an increase in academic demands and homework, which significantly reduces the time available for unstructured leisure activities. Furthermore, many children are involved in a variety of organized extracurricular activities, such as sports clubs, music lessons, or other courses. These structured activities often leave little room for spontaneous nature experiences, as they mostly take place in controlled environments and are rarely conducted outdoors.

Finally, cultural changes have also had a significant impact on the time children spend in nature. In many modern societies, the value placed on nature experiences has changed over time. While previous generations often had a close relationship with nature because daily life was more closely connected to it, this connection has weakened in today's world. Priorities have shifted, and many families place more value on technology, participation in organized leisure activities, or academic achievements than on spending time in nature. These cultural changes contribute to children today having less incentive to spend their free time outdoors. Additionally, Dr. Clements' research highlights how parental fears and the growing influence of technology contribute to the decline in spontaneous, unstructured outdoor play.

Consequences of reduced nature contact

The decline in the time children spend in nature has various and far-reaching consequences, affecting their physical and mental health, as well as their relationship with the environment. Firstly, reduced nature contact directly impacts children's physical health. Children who spend less time outdoors tend to be less physically active, leading to an increase in sedentary activities. These behaviors are strongly correlated with a variety of health problems, including an increased risk of obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and generally poorer physical fitness. This rise in sedentary behavior is particularly concerning in an age where childhood obesity has become a global epidemic, with significant implications for long-term health outcomes. According to research published by Michigan State University, decreased time spent outdoors is associated with a higher risk of conditions like obesity and Type II diabetes, as children miss out on the physical activities that outdoor play naturally encourages.

Moreover, outdoor play is not just about exercise; it also promotes the development of essential motor skills. Activities like running, climbing, and balancing help children develop coordination, strength, and flexibility. Additionally, these activities strengthen bone density, a crucial aspect of physical development and boost the immune system by exposing children to diverse environments, which can enhance their ability to fend off illnesses. The lack of natural sunlight exposure, often due to spending more time indoors, can also lead to vitamin D deficiency. Vitamin D is vital for bone health, immune function, and mood regulation, and its

deficiency has been linked to a range of health issues, including osteoporosis in later life and increased susceptibility to infections.

Beyond the physical impacts, reduced nature contact has significant effects on children's mental health and emotional well-being. Numerous studies have shown that outdoors spending time in nature has powerful positive effects on mental health. Natural environments provide a sense of calm and peace, reducing the levels of stress hormones like cortisol. Children who regularly spend time outdoors generally experience lower stress levels, better concentration, and higher emotional well-being. According to research, access to green spaces has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, highlighting the therapeutic effects of nature. Nature has a unique ability to soothe the mind, providing a respite from the overstimulation of modern life, which is characterized by constant performance pressure and the demands of digital connectivity.

When time in nature is reduced, it can lead to an increase in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and attention disorders. The therapeutic effects of nature, often referred to as "nature therapy" or "eco-therapy," are increasingly recognized in psychological practice. Nature provides an important opportunity for relaxation and recovery, essential for emotional regulation and resilience. The lack of nature experiences can therefore contribute to heightened emotional stress, a sense of disconnection, and a general deterioration in overall well-being. Children deprived of regular nature contact may also struggle with developing coping mechanisms and managing stress, which are crucial life skills.

Furthermore, reduced nature contact also has long-term effects on children's relationship with the environment. Regular contact with nature is crucial for developing environmental awareness and a positive attitude toward environmental protection. Children who spend little time outdoors may develop a more distant relationship with the natural environment. This detachment could lead to a decreased interest in protecting nature and engaging in environmentally friendly behaviors over time. The development of environmental stewardship often begins in childhood, with experiences in nature laying the foundation for a lifelong commitment to environmental causes.

This loss of connection to nature could result in future generations being less motivated to work for the preservation of the natural environment. As children grow up without a strong bond to nature, their inclination to value and protect it diminishes. The reduction of nature experiences thus has not only individual but also societal implications, as the collective willingness to engage in environmental protection may decrease. A society that undervalues nature is likely to prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability, leading to increased environmental degradation.

In the long term, these developments could lead to a society where environmental awareness and the willingness to protect nature are significantly less pronounced. Raising a generation with little contact with nature could negatively impact future efforts in environmental protection. Without a deep, personal connection to nature, the urgency and importance of environmental issues may not resonate as strongly, potentially undermining global efforts to address critical challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice. To counteract these trends, it is essential to reintegrate nature into the daily lives of children, not only for their immediate health benefits but also to ensure the preservation and protection of the environment for future.

Possible solutions and countermeasures

To stop or at least mitigate the decline in nature time among children, various measures are needed at both the individual and societal levels. A key approach is to promote nature experiences in education. Educational institutions such as schools and kindergartens can

play an important role in enabling children to spend more time in nature again. Here, the approaches of developmental and Waldorf education are particularly relevant.

Developmental and Waldorf education

Developmental education emphasizes the importance of the natural environment for the healthy physical, mental, and emotional development of children. In this pedagogical approach, nature is considered the ideal space for learning and development, where children can develop basic skills through independent exploration and experimentation. Developmental psychology supports these approaches by highlighting how important sensory and practical experiences in nature are for children's cognitive and motor development. Through outdoor play, exploring plants and animals, and experiencing natural elements, creativity is fostered, and children learn to solve problems independently and understand relationships.

Waldorf education, developed by Rudolf Steiner, also integrates these principles and goes even further by considering nature experiences as a central component of its educational philosophy. In Waldorf schools and kindergartens, great importance is placed on children spending regular time outdoors and developing a deep understanding and appreciation for the environment through direct contact with nature. The curriculum in Waldorf education is often designed to integrate nature experiences into children's daily lives, whether through regular walks, gardening, or crafts with natural materials. These experiences not only promote physical health but also support emotional and social development by teaching children to live in harmony with nature and take responsibility for their surroundings.

Research methodology

Our schools and kindergartens have been encouraged for more than 15 years to adopt through projects the principles of pedagogical practice that promotes active involvement of students in the field of environmental education and upbringing. Although the positive benefits of children's direct contact with nature (educational, cognitive, social) are being highlighted more and more intensively, teachers and educators still perceive them as a form in teaching rather than as a strategy.

In that context, we conducted a research study to show the relationship with nature that exists (or is absent) among today's children, benefits and consequences that children can have depending on the time they spend in nature.

The research was conducted in two kindergartens in May 2023. One kindergarten is "Vera Ciriviri Trena", branch "Razvigorče" located in the central city area in the municipality of Štip. The research included 31 children, of which 18 were male and 13 female, aged 5-6 years and they comprise the preschool level group, before starting the first grade of the nine-year primary education in R. Macedonia. The second kindergarten is a branch of the kindergarten "Astibo" in the suburban settlement of Babi.

We interviewed 25 children, of which 14 were female and 11 were male, aged 5-6. We also surveyed the mothers of the interviewed children, i.e. 25 in total.

The interviews and surveys were carried out by the students of preschool education at the "Faculty of Educational Sciences" - Štip, who carry out their pedagogical practice there.

The interview consisted of several questions:

1. Personal questions:
How old are you?
To mark male or female
Describe where do you live?/city/village
2. How would you describe nature?

3. Which animals do you see most often in nature?
4. Describe how you looked after them.
5. How much time do you spend outside your home during the week? What activities do you participate in?
6. What natural phenomena have you seen? Describe them (rainbow, solar eclipse, etc.).
7. How much time do you spend watching TV/playing video games or using the computer per week?

Research results

After the statistical processing of the data, we got the following results. The children who were interviewed from the kindergarten "Vera Ciriviri Trena", branch "Razvigorče" live in Štip. Štip is a large, populated city. We interviewed 31 children, 18 of them boys and 13 girls. The answers to the questions in the questionnaire are as follows:

They describe nature as beautiful, gifted, and able to create many different things. "Nature is beautiful, because there are many things that she can create, and we cannot. There are many different and beautiful plants and animals." Nature is seen as something beautiful where animals are free, trees grow and everything is green. Children distinguish between the world of nature and the world of people (e.g., "nature is what the Earth has made, the world of animals, forests, meadows, places not covered by buildings").

Children point to kittens, dogs, and pigeons as the most frequently seen animals. These animals are part of their environment on a daily basis. Three children who pointed to a squirrel, a deer and a dolphin as animals had seen them outside their city.

Most children say that they go to play with their friends. One says: "I take care of my cat. My friends and I treat the animals in the neighborhood".

Unfortunately, although many of them say they play outside, they also spend a great deal of their time watching television or playing computer games. It is an interesting point that they know they do not have to do it, but they do it anyway. It is also interesting that girls are not interested in playing computer games. Boys spend an average of 3-4 hours a day playing on the computer. On average, children watch 1-2 hours of television per day. They mostly watch cartoons.

They describe what has happened to them and how they feel when any of the listed phenomena has occurred. Some of them have attempted to describe the phenomenon. "I have seen dew on flowers. It looks like water. Steam is not commonly seen. When you look around you can't see anything. The rainbow is very beautiful and has seven colors. Ice looks like snow. Like white powder."

The second kindergarten in which the research was carried out is a branch of the kindergarten "Astibo" in the suburban settlement of Babi.

We interviewed 25 children, of which 15 were female and 10 were male, aged 5-6. We surveyed the mothers of the interviewed children, i.e. a total of 25 mothers. The responses received were as follows:

Nature is seen as something beautiful where animals are free, trees grow and everything is green. Children distinguish between the world of nature and the world of people (e.g. "nature is what the Earth has made, the world of animals, forests, meadows, places not covered by buildings").

Most of the children are aware of birds and different insects. They do not distinguish between wild animals and domestic pets.

Children show great care for the animals that surround them. They bring them food, build shelters, look after them and play with them.

Children spend a lot of time outside. They meet their friends after school to play; they go there by themselves.

They describe natural phenomena in very detail.

It is interesting to note that girls are not interested in playing computer games. Boys spend an average of 34 minutes a day playing on the computer. On average, children watch 60 minutes of television per day. Most of all, they watch cartoons.

The second part of our research is obtaining answers from the mothers of the surveyed children in order to get more detailed knowledge about how they spent their free time when they were children, and how their children spend their free time during the day.

A total of 56 mothers of the interviewed children from the two kindergartens were included in the survey. After the statistical processing of the data, we came to the following results:

Over 85% (or 48 mothers) confirm that their children spend less time outside than when they were children. Almost all mothers say that when they were children, they spent a lot more time outside each day.

80% of mothers report that they spent 3 or more hours playing outside, in contrast to today when only 35% of children spend that much time playing outside.

Further approaches

In addition to school education and the specific approaches of developmental and Waldorf education, raising awareness among parents and communities is also of great importance. Parents play a crucial role in enabling and encouraging their children to access nature. It is therefore important to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of nature experiences. This can be done through information campaigns, workshops, or parent evenings in schools and kindergartens, where the positive effects of outdoor time on children's development are highlighted. Communities can also play an active role by developing programs and initiatives to promote nature experiences. For example, they could organize nature walks or family outings to parks and take care of and expand local green spaces. Another important aspect is improving access to natural spaces, especially in urban areas where this is often limited. Urban planners and local governments can take measures to create more green spaces, parks, and nature reserves that are easily accessible. Expanding safe walking and cycling paths that connect natural areas with residential areas could also make access to nature easier. Furthermore, preserving and protecting existing green spaces is crucial to ensure that they continue to be used as places for nature experiences.

Long-term changes, however, require an adjustment of societal norms and cultural values. It is important to promote a culture that recognizes and supports the value of nature experiences. This can be achieved through media, educational programs, and public campaigns that emphasize the benefits of nature for physical and mental health. Political measures, such as introducing more leisure opportunities in nature or supporting environmental education programs, can also bring about positive change. Additionally, the role model function of parents, teachers, and community leaders is important in establishing new norms and showing children that nature experiences are a valuable part of life.

Overall, there are many ways to combat the decline in nature time among children. Educational institutions, parents, communities, and society as a whole can all contribute to giving children more access to nature again. By implementing targeted measures, including the approaches of developmental and Waldorf education, and changing cultural values, we can ensure that future generations are more closely connected with nature and experience the positive effects of this connection on their health and well-being.

Conclusion

The investigation into the decline in nature time among children shows that this trend is the result of a complex interplay of technological, societal, and cultural changes. While previous generations were characterized by a natural lifestyle that included spending a lot of time outdoors, the conditions for children have fundamentally changed over the past decades. Technological developments, increasing urbanization, rising safety concerns, and the greater structuring of leisure time through school and extracurricular activities have led to children spending significantly less time in nature today. This decline, however, has far-reaching consequences. Reduced contact with nature not only affects children's physical health by increasing the risk of obesity and other health issues but also impacts their mental health and emotional well-being. Additionally, the loss of regular nature contact can lead to a weaker connection with the environment, which could long-term diminish environmental awareness and the willingness to engage in environmental protection.

To counteract these negative developments, it is necessary to take targeted measures. Promoting nature experiences in educational institutions, particularly through the integration of developmental and Waldorf pedagogical approaches, offers a promising way to reconnect children with nature. Moreover, parents and communities must actively work to improve access to natural spaces and raise awareness of the importance of nature for children's development. Long-term changes also require an adjustment of societal norms and cultural values, placing the value of nature experiences back in the forefront.

Overall, it becomes clear that it is possible to combat the decline in nature time among children if educational institutions, families, and society as a whole work together to give children more access to nature. Through these collective efforts, we can ensure that future generations fully benefit from the many advantages that contact with nature offers.

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ZAŠTO DECA PROVODE MANJE VREMENA U PRIRODNOJ SREDINI?

Apstrakt: Životi dece su se radikalno promenili u poslednjih nekoliko godina. Deca imaju malo slobodnog vremena. Njihovi životi su strukturirani, organizovani i tempirani skoro do minuta. Današnja deca su manje povezana sa svetom prirode nego u bilo kom drugom trenutku u istoriji. Više se ne provodi slobodno vreme na otvorenom, u prirodi. Sve veći broj istraživanja je pokazao da prirodni svet ima brojne prednosti za decu i odrasle. Iako je još uvek misteriozno kako um, telo i duh dobijaju od izloženosti prirodi i iskustva sa prirodom, empirijski dokazi nas teraju da preispitamo živote današnje dece. Ova prirodna veza je zamenjena na različite načine – veća interakcija sa digitalnim („uključenim“) svetom, manje nestrukturisane igre na otvorenom i kroz rastuću urbanizaciju. Ovo smanjeno izlaganje prirodi ima posledice koje tek počinjemo da shvatamo. Istraživanja u različitim disciplinama sada sugerišu da ova nepovezanost (i figurativna i doslovna) ima dalekosežne posledice po zdravlje i dobrobit kako pojedinaca, tako i prirodnog okruženja u kojem deluju. Deca su pametnija, kooperativnija, srećnija i zdravija kada imaju česte i raznovrsne mogućnosti za slobodnu i nestrukturisanu igru na otvorenom. U ovom radu predstavljamo rezultate istraživanja sprovedenog na deci od 3-7 godina u vrtićima u gradskoj i seoskoj sredini. Rezultati su statistički obrađeni iz kojih dobijeni rezultati daju zaključak o povezanosti dece sa prirodnim okruženjem.

Ključne reči: deca, priroda, svet prirode, prirodna povezanost, vrtići.