

Changes in Play Patterns and Leisure Time Among Male Adolescents: A Comparative Study Between the 1980s Generation and the Contemporary Generation – Oued Rhum (El Qadous) Neighborhood as a Model

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Abstract. *This research aims to analyze the fundamental transformations in play patterns and leisure practices among adolescents through a comparative approach between two distinct generations: the 1980s generation (currently aged 37–40) and the contemporary adolescent generation (aged 11–16), using the Oued Rhum (El Qadous) neighborhood in Algiers as a field study site.*

The research problem is based on a central question: what transformations have occurred in play patterns and leisure activities across these two generations, and what are their sociological implications in the contemporary Algerian context?

The methodology relies on semi-structured interviews (35–40 respondents), direct ethnographic observation in various spaces, and photo-supported interviews. The study reveals a shift from collective play practices in physical public spaces to more individual and virtual practices, linked to the reconfiguration of family cultural capital.

The findings contribute to a deeper sociological understanding of socialization mechanisms and the role of space in shaping adolescents' recreational practices across generations.

Keywords: *play patterns, public spaces, generational comparison, collective memory, digital transformation*

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Yeniyyətə oğlanlar arasında oyun tərzlərində və asudə vaxtlarda dəyişikliklər: 1980-ci illər nəsli ilə müasir nəsil arasında müqayisəli tədqiqat – Oued Rhum (Əl Qadous) məhəlləsi model kimi

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Xülasə. *Bu tədqiqatın məqsədi iki fərqli nəsil arasında müqayisəli yanaşma yolu ilə yeniyyətlər arasında oyun vərdişlərində və asudə vaxt təcrübələrində fundamental dəyişiklikləri təhlil etməkdir: 1980-ci illər nəsli (hazırda 37-40 yaş arası) və müasir yeniyyətə nəsli (11-16 yaş arası), Əlcəzairdəki Oued Rhum (Əl Qadous) məhəlləsi tədqiqat sahəsi kimi istifadə edilmişdir.*

Tədqiqat probleminin əsas sualı budur: bu iki nəsil arasında oyun və asudə vaxt fəaliyyətlərində hansı dəyişikliklər baş verib və onların müasir Əlcəzair kontekstində sosioloji nəticələri nələndir?

Metodologiya yarı strukturlaşdırılmış müsahibələrə (35-40 respondent), müxtəlif məkanlarda birbaşa etnoqrafik müşahidəyə və foto ilə dəstəklənən müsahibələrə əsaslanır. Tədqiqat fiziki ictimai məkanlarda kollektiv oyun təcrübələrindən daha fərdi və virtual təcrübələrə keçidi aşkar edir ki, bu da ailə mədəni kapitalının yenidən qurulması ilə əlaqədardır. Nəticələr sosiallaşma mexanizmlərinin və yeniyetmələrin istirahət təcrübələrinin nəsil boyu formalaşmasında məkanın rolunun daha dərin sosioloji anlaşılmasına töhfə verir. Bu tədqiqatın əhəmiyyəti oyun vərdisləri və asudə vaxt təcrübələrində sosial və məkan transformasiyalarını ciddi şəkildə araşdırmaqdır.

Açar sözlər: oyun vərdisləri, ictimai məkanlar, nəsil müqayisəsi, kollektiv yaddaş, rəqəmsal transformasiya

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Introduction

“Play” and “leisure practices” cannot be reduced to mere passing activities used to fill free time; from a sociological perspective, they constitute a real laboratory for the production and reproduction of values, social bonds, and mechanisms of socialization. The space in which individuals engage in play, the tools they use, and the nature of the social interaction that emerges among them are all elements that contribute to the construction of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the habitus; that is, the system of dispositions that guides individuals within society. Therefore, the study of play becomes a rich field for understanding social transformations in lifestyles and in the relationship between space, culture, and technology.

In the contemporary Algerian context, the “play field” is undergoing a critical turning point, where the memories of the 1980s generation—whose social identity was strongly shaped by the neighborhood space (el-houma) and open areas as a natural extension of social life—intersect with the reality of a new generation of adolescents living under the influence of the digital revolution and rapid urban transformation. This intersection is redefining the concepts of “proximity,” “belonging,” and “public space,” raising profound questions about the future of social relations and the dynamics of socialization in Algerian cities.

Based on this observation, the present study raises a central research question: How have play patterns and leisure practices changed between the 1980s generation and the contemporary generation, and what are the sociological implications of these transformations in the Algerian context?

This main question branches into several sub-questions, including:

1. Does the transformation in play patterns reflect only a change in tools, or a restructuring of the socialization system itself?
2. Has the shift from production-based to consumption-based play altered the nature of social relations and socialization mechanisms?
3. Can the change in the meaning of “el-houma” (from an interactive space to a passive space) explain the loss of mutual recognition between generations regarding the value of play?
4. The study is based on several preliminary hypotheses, the most important of which are:

5. The spread of smartphones and digital technologies has contributed to the contraction of the use of public space and the decline of physical play among adolescents in the Oued Rhum neighborhood.
6. The shrinking of traditional play forms reflects a shift in the model of socialization from a productive system to a consumptive one.
7. Public space has lost its educational function as a framework for collective socialization and has become a neutral space in which mutual recognition of the legitimacy of leisure practices is weakened.

The importance of this study lies in its attempt to seriously investigate social and spatial transformations within one of the most vital fields: play patterns and leisure practices. Theoretically, it seeks to contribute to the sociological understanding of youth and digitalization in Algeria by linking transformations in habitus with changes in cultural capital, as well as the relationship between space and time. Methodologically, it adopts a comparative approach combining semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and collective memory analysis as a tool to measure generational discontinuity. Practically, its findings may serve as a knowledge base for urban planners and educational policymakers to better understand emerging digital socialization patterns and propose integrated approaches between public space rehabilitation and digital reality.

Through this empirical comparative study conducted in the Oued Rhum (El Qadous) neighborhood in Algiers, the research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe the patterns of transformation in play and leisure between the two generations, highlighting differences in spatial use and forms of interaction.
2. To explain the underlying mechanisms of these transformations through the analysis of socio-economic and cultural factors influencing the reconfiguration of habitus.
3. To analyze the sociological implications of the shift from a physical recreational model to a digital one, and assess its impact on social relations and mechanisms of socialization in contemporary Algeria.

Methods

To achieve the objectives of the study and ensure scientific accuracy in documenting social transformations in play patterns and leisure practices, a methodological strategy based on triangulation was adopted. This approach combines both qualitative and comparative methods, allowing for a multi-dimensional understanding of the phenomenon across temporal, spatial, and social levels.

Methodological Approach and Type of Study:

The study adopts a micro-ethnographic approach, based on intensive field immersion within the Oued Rhum (El Qadous) neighborhood in Algiers. The aim is to observe practices in their natural context without detaching them from their urban and social environment.

A descriptive–analytical comparative method was employed along two main axes:

- Temporal axis: comparison between current practices (based on direct observation) and past practices (based on narratives retrieved from collective memory).
- Spatial axis: comparison of interaction patterns in public space (street, playground) versus private space (home, room).

Study Population and Sample:

To ensure qualitative representation of the two generations under comparison, purposive sampling was adopted based on specific socio-demographic characteristics.

Sample Type	Age Group	Characteristics and Research Function
Contemporary generations sample	Adolescents (11–16 years)	Represents the “current actors.” They were selected during their presence in public and private spaces and embody a play pattern based on the “digital habitus.”
1980s generations sample	Adults (37–40 years)	Represents “memory keepers.” They were selected due to their shared upbringing conditions and environmental interaction with current adolescents in the same or similar neighborhoods, enabling historical comparison.

Source. Author’s own work

Data Collection Tools and Construction:

An integrated “research toolkit” was designed, combining real-time field observation and historical memory reconstruction, including:

a. Systematic Scheduled Observation:

Instead of random observation, a structured protocol was adopted to monitor peak field activity.

- Spatial frame: Oued Rhum playground (“El Qadous”) and surrounding transitional spaces.
- Temporal frame: over a period of two months, on Fridays and Saturdays (15:00–20:00) and Tuesdays (17:00–20:00).

b. Interviews:

- Natural group interviews: conducted with adolescents in their familiar environments, allowing the reduction of formality and enabling a better understanding of digital play dynamics and “room culture” from their own perspective.
- Semi-structured interviews: conducted with a sample of 37–40 adults, using a “free memory recall” technique to reconstruct traditional games (such as Sersoua, Zarbot, bird catching) and analyze their associated social meanings such as masculinity, cleverness, and patience.

Previous Studies:

First Study: Youth Uses of Public Parks: A Sociological Study in Mascara (Jradi, Soualemia, 2021, 2011–222) (Blabbas, & Hssini, 2022).

The study by Jradi and Soualemia (2018) on public space examined the social functions of urban parks, concluding that youth use these spaces as a tool for building a “social link” and forming new relationships, considering space as an active mediating environment.

Referencing this study is essential for the present research to establish a reverse comparison. While parks in Mascara still function as spaces of social attraction and relationship-building, our field data in Oued Rhum reveals a complete decline in the social function of the equivalent natural space (the forest), which has turned into a socially “dead” area. This indicates divergent urban transformation trajectories and their impact on youth practices between inland cities and the capital.

Second Study: Communicative Dimensions of Mobile Phone Use Culture among Algerian Youth (Blabbas, Hssini, 2022, 182–209) (Meijer et al., 2024).

This study highlights that the mobile phone is no longer a neutral technical tool but has triggered a qualitative transformation in communication patterns, reshaping the social fabric of youth. The mobile phone has become an “existential space” that raises fundamental questions about psychological and cultural impacts. This finding aligns strongly with our thesis regarding the shift of “authority” from handmade tools (such as Zarbot) to ready-made digital devices. It supports the idea that what is occurring is not merely a change in entertainment tools, but a comprehensive reengineering of the habitus, where virtual presence (through the phone) replaces physical presence (in the neighborhood), leading to a radical redefinition of proximity, distance, and social interaction.

Results

Table 1

Space – Body – Time

Dimension	Generation of the 1980s (then)	Contemporary generation (now)
Main space	Neighborhood + forest / Ben Aknoun Park; wide spatial distribution	One main gathering point (neighborhood playground); very weak presence of the forest despite its proximity
Presence in space	Most children/adolescents spend most free time outside in the neighborhood and forest	Around 35 adolescents regularly present in the playground, but with reduced bodily engagement
Use of the body	Active body: running, climbing, descending slopes, setting traps; continuous movement	Significant portion of time spent sitting (1–3 hours); organized matches do not include all present participants
Temporal organization	Successive play seasons (zarbout season, boomerang-like games, “sirsou”, etc.) + constant presence of football	Fixed daily patterns (football + phone + sitting) without clear “seasons”

**Source.* Author’s own work

The comparative table, which examines spatial, bodily, and temporal dimensions, reveals a radical shift in the sensory and motor structure of play between two distinct generations. Ethnographically, this shift requires a careful deconstruction of how historical and spatial transformations have reshaped the individual’s relationship with physical space, bodily practice, and temporal cycles.

First dimension: Space —from spatial extension to a single point

The data indicate a clear contraction in the spatial range occupied by adolescents. In the 1980s generation, the neighborhood and the adjacent forest (Ben Aknoun Park) formed an interconnected spatial system in which children moved between different points depending on the type of game and its seasonality. The forest was not a repellent space but an organic extension of the neighborhood—a field of adventure, exploration, hunting, and resource gathering (such as collecting pine wood for crafting “zarbout”).

Today, however, this spatial world has been reduced to a single gathering point: the neighborhood playground. This contraction does not reflect mere comfort or laziness; rather, it indicates a reorganization of play spaces within the neighborhood. The forest—despite its geographical proximity—has practically disappeared from daily practice (Rodela & Lundmark, 2025).

This reveals an important ethnographic paradox: it is not the physical space that has contracted, but bodily practice itself. This contraction is not neutral. It implies the disappearance of a spatial

experience once accumulated through movement across multiple locations and the acquisition of local ecological knowledge (where animals hide, where the best wood is found, what lies deep in the forest). The contemporary adolescent, in contrast, moves within a pre-known, de-symbolized space devoid of mystery.

Second dimension: the body — from continuous activity to prolonged sitting

Ethnographic observation shows a completely different bodily configuration. In the 1980s generation, the body was continuously active: running, climbing, descending slopes, crafting tools (bending over wood to carve “zarbout”), setting traps (slow and careful movements), and even stationary games involved manual engagement (cutting branches, lighting fire, digging).

In contrast, direct observation of contemporary adolescents reveals a significant amount of time spent sitting for one to three hours. This sitting is not passive waiting but a complex form of engagement involving watching others play, using mobile phones individually or collectively, and social interaction. However, large-scale physical movement has clearly decreased.

A key ethnographic observation emerges here: the body has not become inactive; rather, the type of activity has changed. Instead of spatial and motor activity (the body moving in space), activity has become visual and digital (eyes and fingers engaged with the phone).

Third dimension: time organization — from seasonal cycles to fixed routine

This dimension reveals one of the deepest ethnographic transformations: the relationship with time itself.

In the 1980s generation, play was seasonally structured. Games followed a socially recognized temporal cycle: zarbout season, then “boomerang” games, then “sirsou”, etc. Each season carried its own cultural meaning, and transitions between games did not reflect boredom but a culturally structured rhythm. Even football, though constant throughout the year, coexisted with seasonal variations.

Today, patterns are stable and repetitive: football + phone + sitting. Nearly the same activities occur daily. The disappearance of seasonal rhythms reflects the disappearance of a specific relationship with nature and social time. The contemporary adolescent no longer experiences the neighborhood through recognized temporal shifts but through continuous repetition.

The critical ethnographic intersection: Space – Body – Time as a unified system

What the first table clearly shows—when read in depth—is that these three dimensions cannot be separated. They form an interconnected system. The contraction of space led to a reduction in the scale of bodily movement (instead of running in the forest, adolescents sit in a small playground). This reduction in movement is accompanied by a transformation in temporal organization: from rich seasonal cycles to a fixed routine. Together, these three dimensions have restructured what Bourdieu calls habitus: “the embodied and unconscious structure that shapes the individual” (Khentabli & Atoub, 2018).

Restricted space + sedentary body + repetitive time = a new mode of spatial-temporal existence.

This is not a simple decline in play activity, but a deep reprogramming of how adolescents inhabit their neighborhood physically and how they experience space and time.

Table 2
Space – Body – Time

Dimension	Generation of the 1980s (then)	Contemporary generation (now)
Sample size	Entire childhood group in the neighborhood (10 informants reconstructing a shared pattern)	35 adolescents observed directly (11–16 years old)
Game diversity	High diversity: sirsou, zarbout, bous, “ter bouchon”, oliman, rolling games, hunting, sitting around fire, etc.	Limited diversity: organized football (22/35), digital gaming (19), home video games (9), game cafés (7)
Tool production	High level of handmade tools (wooden zarbout from olive/pine, traps, homemade ball from milk bag, etc.)	Near absence of production: ready-made tools (factory balls, smartphones, consoles)
Duration of traditional games	Traditional games persisted until age 18 and beyond	Traditional play is age-limited; early shift toward digital gaming
Type of skills	Strong motor, manual, tactical, and social negotiation skills	Increasing digital skills; weaker manual and less intensive motor skills

**Source.* Author’s own work

The second table offers a different analytical threshold than the first. While the first table examined transformations of space, body, and time, this one focuses on the internal structure of play itself: what is played, with which tools, and through which skills. Here emerges one of the deepest sociological shifts.

First axis: from rich diversity to concentrated scarcity

The data show that the 1980s generation experienced a high diversity of games: sirsou, zarbout, bous, ter bouchon, oliman, rolling games, bird and rabbit hunting, etc. Even sitting around the fire was considered a “game” in a sociological sense, with its own rituals, rules, and meanings. This diversity was not random abundance, but an organized system in which each game had its age group and seasonal timing.

In contrast, the contemporary generation experiences a more restricted form of diversity: organized football (22 out of 35), digital games (19), home electronic games (9), arcade/game cafés (7). In other words, from more than eight freely chosen games per child, the range has narrowed to about 3–4 predefined options.

However, this quantitative description hides a more important issue: the difference is not only in number, but in the nature of choice itself. Past games were open-ended; a child could start with zarbout and end in a hunting trip. Contemporary options are closed and structured: from football → sitting → phone.

Second axis: from handmade production to ready-made consumption

Games in the 1980s generation were produced. The zarbout was carved from olive or pine wood. The “rolma” was a small homemade vehicle built by children. Traps were complex mechanical devices requiring an intuitive understanding of mechanics. Even the football was improvised from a milk bag filled with newspapers. These were not simple crafts, but forms of cultural production.

When a child makes a zarbout, they learn in practice how to select wood, carve, polish, and test balance. They learn patience (it takes time), creativity (how to make it spin longer), and negotiation (who owns the better tool).

In contrast, the contemporary generation lives in a world of ready-made objects: factory-produced balls, smartphones, gaming consoles. This shift from production to consumption is not merely technological progress; it represents a deep restructuring of habitus.

The body that once produced and created has become a body that receives and consumes. This transformation is not socially neutral. Sociological research shows that “manual production builds self-confidence, competence, and creativity in a fundamentally different way from consumption” (Sennett, 2008).. The child who builds their own zarbout exercises sovereignty over the object, whereas the child who buys a phone is dependent on a tool owned by a distant corporation.

Third axis: from negotiation and cunning skills to digital skills

The table reveals a transformation in the skills profile. The 1980s generation developed high manual skills (carpentry, carving), motor skills (climbing, running, balance), and complex social skills (cunning, patience, negotiation, leadership).

Cunning, for example, refers to winning games without direct physical strength. Patience refers to waiting hours for bird hunting. Negotiation refers to convincing others to change rules or share resources.

The contemporary generation develops increasing digital skills: rapid finger movements, navigating digital interfaces, following programmed instructions, and interpreting on-screen visual/audio stimuli. However, manual skills are weaker and motor engagement is less intense.

The ethnographic difference here is profound. It is not that digital skills are necessarily inferior, but that skills are formed through fundamentally different experiential systems. The child developing skills through manual production experiences the physical resistance of the world, whereas the child developing skills through screens experiences immediate responsiveness without resistance (pressing a button = instant result) (Ghammaz & Ben Labeled, 2022).

Critical ethnographic intersection: from manual cultural capital to digital cultural capital

The second table reveals a transformation that goes beyond a simple change in play tools; it indicates a radical restructuring of cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense. While the manual cultural capital of the previous generation was relatively democratic and communal—skills acquired through imitation and free environmental resources—the contemporary digital cultural capital is governed by centralization and private ownership.

This shift introduces an obligatory economic mediation (devices and platforms) between the child and their activity, carrying a profound sociological implication: the formation of habitus has been detached from its local and collective context and increasingly subjected to the engineering logic of global technological power structures.

Table 3
Social relations, control, and intergenerational evaluations

Dimension	Generation of the 1980s (then)	Contemporary generation (now)
Meaning of play and “houma”	Play = life and socialization; the neighborhood (“houma”) educates— “the houma is a school; whoever didn’t study there didn’t study”	Play is more associated with leisure and “killing time”; the neighborhood becomes a place of sitting and watching rather than a “school” of values
Evaluation of the current generation	Nostalgic but critical view: “generation of electricity/TikTok”, lazy, phone-addicted, poorly behaved	Adolescents mock past games (“people are making money while I run after sirsou”)
Mutual recognition	The older generation does not recognize the value of new forms of play	The younger generation does not recognize the meaning of older play, seeing it as “strange” or “stupid”

*Source. Author’s own work

The third table reveals a fundamental transformation in the semantic structure of public space and play practices. Moving from the level of material practice (tools and games) to the level of social representations (meanings and roles), the table highlights the mechanisms that reproduce—or dismantle—intergenerational social bonds.

First dimension: redefinition of the role of public space

Former meaning: the “houma” as a parallel educational institution

For the 1980s generation, the neighborhood functioned as an autonomous educational mediator outside formal institutions. Its role went beyond transmitting motor skills linked to play; it acted as a comprehensive process of socialization where individuals learned behavioral codes and collective values through continuous participation embedded in the local social fabric.

The expression “the houma is a school; whoever didn’t study there didn’t study” reflects an understanding of public space as a coherent pedagogical structure in which learning is organically integrated into social life. This reading is reinforced by Jradi and Soualemia, who found that youth use the public park as a means of seeking new relationships, meeting and communicating with others, and strengthening social ties between individuals.

The expression “the houma is a school; whoever didn’t study there didn’t study” reflects an understanding of public space as a coherent pedagogical structure in which socialization is organically embedded in everyday life. This interpretation is supported by Jradi and Soualemia, who found that: “youth use the public park to seek new relationships, communicate with others, and strengthen social ties between individuals” (Jradi & Soualemia 2021).

Current transformation: space as neutral waiting area

The contemporary generation treats the neighborhood as a neutral functional space: a place for rest or “waiting” lacking the dense symbolic meaning of the previous era. Play practices have not disappeared, but their social status has changed—from being the core of social education to a marginal activity with limited formative power in shaping habitus. This shift suggests a reduction in the influence of local space on socialization and a partial transfer of this function to other mediators (nuclear family, digital screens).

Second dimension: rupture in moral evaluation systems

Nostalgic-critical stance of older generations

Adults adopt a complex position toward the younger generation: nostalgia combined with judgment. Labels such as “generation of electricity/TikTok” are not neutral descriptions; they carry moral assumptions about a loss of discipline, respect, and collective sensibility.

Digital tools become symbolic markers of a deeper moral displacement, where technological objects are read as signs of ethical decline.

Pragmatic materialism among adolescents

Adolescents evaluate practices through a different criterion: material usefulness. The statement “people are making money while I run after sirsou” does not simply reflect rejection of tradition; it indicates a restructuring of value systems in which time and effort are judged according to immediate returns.

From a sociological perspective, this shift reflects the penetration of economic logic into everyday practices, where “profit” or “direct benefit” becomes a substitute for earlier symbolic and communal value systems.

The third dimension: the absence of a space for mutual recognition

The table reveals the absence of a shared space in which a process of mutual recognition between the two generations can take place. Each generation is positioned within its own normative horizon, which prevents any meaningful dialogue regarding the legitimacy and value of recreational practices. The older generation tends to evaluate the practices of the younger generation through the lens of past standards, which leads it to dismiss the possibility that new forms of play may carry different meanings or values. As a result, judgment easily slips into denigration and devaluation.

In contrast, the younger generation does not even enter the space of recognition as such. Its attitude is not expressed through explicit rejection, but rather through indifference, whereby past games are reduced to practices that “offer nothing” in terms of meaning or enjoyment and therefore do not even deserve systematic critical reflection.

This situation does not simply reflect a difference in preferences; rather, it expresses the erosion of a shared linguistic and symbolic ground that would allow for the circulation of recognition. Each generation speaks a different moral language, which makes the acknowledgment of the other’s practices a demand that finds no natural channels of expression.

Major social implications

The breakdown of informal social control mechanisms: The decline in organized collective play practices is accompanied by a noticeable weakening of informal social control mechanisms, which were previously based on horizontal peer surveillance and subtle symbolic pressure within the group. Within a fragmented play space and increasingly individualized and digitalized practices, the local community’s capacity to produce shared behavioral norms diminishes. This opens the way for other forms of interaction and conflict, such as bullying and various forms of everyday minor violence, which are no longer regulated by the same logic of “group respect” that formerly structured individual behavior.

Crisis of recognition and social cohesion

Skill is no longer developed solely through manual or physical engagement within a local community; rather, it has become increasingly associated with interacting with ready-made technological media and pre-structured environments. This does not mean that contemporary adolescents are less competent; instead, it suggests that competence itself is now produced within different contexts, each

carrying its own constraints and opportunities. Therefore, the comparison between generations should be understood as a comparison between two modes of social formation rather than between different levels of superiority.

The result is a single neighborhood inhabited by “coexisting generations” that share physical space but not shared interpretive frameworks or recognition channels. This leads to weakened relational bonds and gradual erosion of everyday social cohesion.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of play patterns among adolescents in Oued Romane cannot be understood merely as a superficial change in recreational media. Rather, it should be viewed as an indicator of a deeper reorganization of the young actor’s relationship with the social environment in which they operate. This suggests that the transformation in practice extends beyond observable behavior to the reconfiguration of social relationships themselves, as illustrated by the Bush School experience, where the child’s experience functioned as a connecting space between school and home (Harper & Gray, 2026). The issue therefore concerns changing conditions for the everyday acquisition of skills and the transfer of part of the formative experience from spaces of direct interaction with the surrounding environment to settings that are more regulated and less open to individual initiative. This transformation is of particular sociological significance because it affects the very structure of socialization rather than merely the forms of entertainment.

The data also reveal that the local environment no longer performs its integrative function to the same extent as it did in the past. This decline is not simply attributable to the presence or absence of physical space itself, but rather to the way that space is perceived and evaluated by social actors. In this regard, the referenced study demonstrates that higher levels of satisfaction with one’s environment are associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in physical activity more frequently, “suggesting that the perceived quality of space influences the intensity of its use, rather than its mere geographical existence” (Pehlivan & Karaca, 2024).

When free movement within the neighborhood declines and the ability to transform space into a field of exploration and practice diminishes, this reflects a change in the use of space rather than its disappearance. More precisely, the issue lies not in the existence of space itself but in the reduced intensity of social investment in it. Consequently, spatial transformation becomes an integral part of the broader transformation in patterns of everyday social interaction.

The study also indicates that collective play has lost much of its capacity to organize relationships among peers. Traditional games imposed forms of coordination, generated rotating social roles, and kept interaction open to negotiation, competition, and mutual regulation. By contrast, newer forms of entertainment tend to reduce this interactive structure, either because they are more individualistic, short-term in nature, or do not require the same level of practical participation. This helps explain the weakening of certain mechanisms of informal regulation within peer groups.

From another perspective, the findings reveal a transformation in the conditions through which social skills themselves are acquired.

“This review identifies a multifaceted interplay of social, environmental, psychological, biological, individual, and institutional factors that contribute to the decline in PA. Among these, modifiable factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, screen time, and academic workload, emerged as particularly influential (Habyarimana et al., 2025)”.

Skill is no longer developed solely through manual or physical engagement within a local community; rather, it has become increasingly associated with interacting with ready-made technological media and pre-structured environments. This does not mean that contemporary adolescents are less competent; instead, it suggests that competence itself is now produced within different contexts, each carrying its own constraints and opportunities. Therefore, the comparison between generations should be understood as a comparison between two modes of social formation rather than between different levels of superiority.

These findings also shed light on an important aspect of the relationship between social time and daily rhythms. Traditional games were often linked to a clear temporal progression and to collective occasions or seasons that held specific meanings within local life. Today, however, leisure activities tend to be organized within more stable routines that are less connected to changes in space, season, or community. Consequently, time itself is experienced in a less collective manner and becomes increasingly subject to repetition and stability.

The data also make it possible to examine the changing position of the family within the socialization process. As the social functions of the neighborhood weaken, adolescents become increasingly dependent on the family sphere and digital media as primary sources of guidance, entertainment, and interaction. Yet this shift does not necessarily represent a smooth transition, as the family does not always compensate for the functions that local social spaces once performed collectively. Moreover, digital media provide forms of communication that differ fundamentally from direct neighborhood interactions. It is here that a gap emerges between traditional and contemporary forms of socialization.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the hypothesis that changes in patterns of play simultaneously reflect changes in forms of social integration. Play is not a marginal activity; rather, it serves as a medium through which relationships are formed, roles are distributed, and individuals learn boundaries, patience, competition, and recognition. Therefore, any transformation in play necessarily reflects broader changes in the structure of everyday social life and in the conditions through which children and adolescents are integrated into the community.

The study further reveals that the ongoing transformation concerns not only individuals but also the spaces, relationships, and symbolic resources that once gave play its meaning. Meijer, Visser, and van Aalst (2024) argue that recent decades have witnessed a decline in urban spaces dedicated to outdoor play, alongside the dominance of risk-reduction approaches in play planning. In practice, this trend has distanced children from urban environments and fragmented the organization of public spaces designated for play. The diminishing presence of natural environments, reduced mobility within neighborhoods, and changing patterns of participation all indicate a broader restructuring of the local social environment. Consequently, analysis should not remain confined to the level of observable behavior but should extend to the social conditions that once made such behavior possible and that have contributed to its weakening in the present context.

These findings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that changes in adolescent practices do not follow a simple, linear direction. Such transformations cannot be reduced to notions of either “decline” or “progress,” as they are often portrayed in prevailing moral judgments. Rather, they represent a redistribution of the resources of social experience among space, the body, technology, and the family. This requires sociological analysis to move beyond direct evaluative comparisons and instead focus on understanding the mechanisms, conditions, and limitations of social change.

In light of these observations, the primary value of this study lies in demonstrating how generational differences are reproduced through everyday life itself rather than merely through explicit discourse. Adolescents are not simply experiencing a change in the tools of play; they are undergoing a

transformation in their mode of interaction with the world and in their perception of place, time, and others. This constitutes the deeper sociological significance revealed by the findings (Meijer et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The results of this study tell the story of a real transition from arecreational/educational model based on collective physical presence to a model mediated by an individualized technical system. However, this transition is not merely a substitution of tools or superficial practices; it represents a deep social reprogramming that affects several complex social systems at their core: the bodily structure of the adolescent and their mode of physical existence in the world; cultural capital and the ways it is acquired and controlled; mechanisms of informal social regulation and their sources of legitimacy; the system of shared values and moral standards between generations; and the meaning of public space and its symbolic sanctity within the local social imagination. The space that once functioned as a generator of social cohesion and collective identities has become a space of passive coexistence, which reflects a genuine crisis of recognition in the Honnethian sense, leading to real ruptures in the fabric of intergenerational social relations.

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