



PlayFit  
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Synthesis report  
'Dutch youth - lifestyle and leisure activities'  
PlayFit project

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## Structure of chapters

### Relevant publications

Each chapter gives a list of relevant publications: reports, books and studies that cover that specific topic in more detail. Not every source is covered in the chapter; some sources are just ‘suggestions for background information’.

### Normal text

Text in black combines findings from several studies; for more details, one can read the references and the relevant publications.

Text in green boxes is cited or translated from certain sources, because it contains valuable information or insights about the target group. Again, the original source should be used for more details.

## Introduction

This report is part of the PlayFit deliverable 1.1 'Analysis of the target group'. This report gives an overview of literature about the leisure activities of the target group, Dutch VMBO youth. It summarises findings from a series of reports, and provides references for further reading.

This report is about youth or adolescents; young people in the transition between childhood and adulthood. This phase encompasses the ages from 11-12 to 18. In specific, this report focuses on Dutch VMBO youth (low/middle-level secondary education), in the ages of 12-16. Naturally though, this group is part of the adolescents, and therefore the complete picture will be sketched on occasions.

A large number of studies focusing on youth and youth behaviour have been executed in the past decades. This report serves as a so-called synthesis report, combining and summarising several studies, in order to give an overview of the available literature. The original publications can be used to obtain more specific data.

It is important to note that almost all studies that exist about youth behaviour provide self-reported data: the studies have used questionnaires and interviews to measure the behaviour of youngsters. In addition, definitions of certain behaviour (e.g. 'what is gaming? does it include internet games?') are vague or non-existent in most studies. Last but not least, most studies have gathered participants via the internet, which creates a biased sample of the target population. The results from the summarised studies in this report should therefore be seen as indications and trends, and not as hard facts.

This report will start with an overview of adolescence from a human development perspective: how do young people change and develop between childhood and adulthood. This is followed by a description of Dutch youth, lifestyle factors and the VMBO schools. In the remainder of the report, we focus on the most popular leisure activities: television, internet, gaming, meeting friends, music and sport.

## Human development - adolescence

This section covers the target group - adolescents - from a human development perspective: how do young people change and develop between childhood and adulthood. Physical, cognitive, social and emotional levels are briefly covered.

### Adolescence

Young people develop themselves between childhood and adulthood, on a physical, cognitive, social and emotional level. Puberty is the beginning of this phase: the rapid flood of hormonal changes that causes different behaviour and bodily characteristics for the youngsters.

### Relevant publications

- Laura E. Berk, *Development through the Lifespan*, 2006
- Patti Valkenburg, *Beeldschermkinderen*, 2008 (in Dutch)
- Huub Nelis & Yvonne van Sark, *Puberbrein binnenstebuiten*, 2010 (in Dutch)

Based on: Laura E. Berk, *Development through the Lifespan*, 2006

Adolescence is the transition between childhood and adulthood; a phase in which children rapidly develop themselves on a physical, cognitive, emotional and social level.

Adolescence is commonly divided into three phases:

1. Early adolescence (11-12 to 14 years)
2. Middle adolescence (14 to 16 years)
3. Late adolescence (16 to 18 years)

Puberty initiates the beginning of adolescence, in a flood of *hormonal changes* that lead to an adult-sized body and sexual maturity.

On a cognitive level, the way adolescents think changes from *requiring concrete examples and reasoning* into *using logic, abstractions and meta-reasoning*. Increased self-reflection often leads to distorted images of the relation between self and other; the *imaginary audience* ("everyone is watching me") and *personal fable* ("I want to be special and unique").

On a social and emotional level, the *identity development* is the biggest change: who is the adolescent, and in which role does he/she see him/herself. *Self-concept* and *self-esteem* are strongly related to this identity development. For minority groups, the struggle between constructing an *ethnic* or *bicultural identity* plays a role as well.

Moral *reasoning* and *conformance* changes, from fixed and authority-enforced to flexible and socially-necessary. *Gender intensification* - gender stereotyping of attitudes and behavior - occurs in the early adolescence, and declines in the middle phase again.

Last but not least, the need for *autonomy*, the forming of strong cliques and crowds, and the strong *peer conformity* and pressure guide the adolescent's behaviour; often resulting in clashes with family, relations and behavioral habits.

## Dutch youth, lifestyle factors and the VMBO school

This section gives an overview of the Dutch youth and the factors that define their lifestyle. In addition, the VMBO school setup is sketched.

### Relevant publications:

- YoungMentality, *De verhalen achter de cijfers 05/06*, 2006 (in Dutch)
- CBS, *Jaarrapport 2009 Landelijke Jeugdmonitor*, 2009 (in Dutch)
- Paul Sikkema, *Jongeren 2009*, 2009 (in Dutch)
- Huub Nelis & Yvonne van Sark, *Puberbrein binnenstebuiten*, 2010 (in Dutch)

### VMBO school and students

This report focuses on VMBO students. VMBO is the four-year low/medium-level education in the Netherlands; the secondary school, where most students start at the age of 12. VMBO education has four levels, ranging from theoretical to practical. In 2008/'09, the Dutch secondary schools counted over 900.000 students, of which ~55% on VMBO level (CBS).

The 'typical' VMBO student does not exist; secondary school youth form a diverse group, with different characteristics, backgrounds, values and preferences. Segmenting this group in distinct behavioral categories is impossible, because youngsters do no longer match their values and activities to the separated groups in which they used to belong (e.g. 'altos' or 'studs'); in fact, many do not belong to one such group at all, or they change several times during their aging development (Nelis and Sark, 2009).

Youth can be described by many factors. The following list gives some examples:

Factor	Examples
demographics	age, gender, ethnicity
environment & safety	city/rural, neighborhood, parental situation
work & financial	work, income, owned products
education	level, subject, school type
life values	explorative, social, idealism
wellness	activity, smoking, drugs, abuse
leisure activities	sport, hobbies
media usage	internet, mobile phones, magazines

## Lifestyle and leisure time

In general, we can define two phases for the VMBO youth (Sikkema, 2009):

- youngsters in the first part of the secondary school (~12-15):  
the *secondary school* is the main point of focus for these youngsters, both in time and (social) attention. In this period, they experience working, earning money and more freedom from their parents. Their expenses are mobile phones, mp3 players, game consoles, games, and clothes.
- youngsters in the last part of the secondary school (~14-18):  
the focus has shifted to *social contacts*, and their *future study*. In general, the youngsters have more freedom, and hardly any duties. Expenses are centred on activities: holiday with friends, going to pubs, buying a scooter or computer, and saving for a driver license.

If we look at the structure of the day for VMBO youth, we can see that the morning and afternoon for weekdays is relatively *uniform*: school and/or educational work. The activities in the *leisure time* differ per youngster, and this is the main difference between them, since youngsters have approximately 6 hours of leisure time per week (CBS, 2003).

Almost all youngsters participate in the same leisure activities; however, the time spent on each activity varies greatly. Television, internet, games, and meeting friends are the most popular ones, all done at least once per week by almost all youngsters (>90%); in fact, these four activities are executed almost on a daily base (Sikkema 2009, CBS 2010c). Sport (numbers differ between studies, 50%-80%) and listening to music (50%) follow these popular activities (CBS 2009, Sikkema 2009, CBS 2010b).

We can conclude that almost all youngsters regularly visit the *internet*, play *games*, watch *television*, and meet with *friends*; most youngsters also listen to *music*, and participate in *sports*. The time spent on each activity varies per youngster: some groups focus mostly on sports or music, while others spent most of their time on games and the internet.

Last but not least, it is important to realise that most activities are executed in *parallel*: e.g. some youngsters watch television and listen to music, while chatting on the internet and playing a casual game. Exact numbers like 'hours watching television per day' are therefore difficult to provide, as can be seen in the highly variable results from major studies. In addition, the definitions of e.g. what is included in gaming or internet use differ greatly, blurring the comparison even more.

Based on: YoungMentality, *De verhalen achter de cijfers 05/06, 2006*

In a study on 4000+ youngsters, YoungMentality has identified seven value-factors to segment youth. These factors are: exploration, status-focus, contact-focus, idealism, family-focus, dedication, and verballity.

Six clusters or categories of youngsters have been defined, primary based on the *exploration* and *status-focus* value-factors.

1. *the housebound comfortables*: youngsters in this category value being home with their family; watching television is their favourite activity, and most of their leisure activities are performed close to their homes. Gaming and playing outside with friends are popular activities; sporting in a club is less common.
2. *the eager explorers*: this group is curious, always searching for different activities and experiences. They are active, eager and committed. Less time is spent in front of the television, and more on the internet and on gaming. They are always multi-tasking, visiting several sites and MSN simultaneously, while watching MTV.
3. *the social adapters*: the youngsters in this group focus on social contacts; they like to be among people, want to make friends, and usually get along with everybody. Their media usage is low compared to the other categories; if they watch television or movies, they do it together with friends or family.
4. *the recognition searchers*: this group is uncertain, and trying to find recognition, by wearing brand clothes and other status-confirming activities. They are the 'mainstream' youngsters, and value other's opinion about them a lot. They use the television and computer almost all the time: secluded at their own room in their home.
5. *the extravert status searchers*: these youngsters are social and status oriented: buying expensive clothes, going to 'fancy' clubs and big parties, and a high usage of the newest technologies. They usually have a part-time job to pay for all that, limiting other hobbies. The internet and mobile phones are mainly used to 'keep on top' of everything: communication, finding trends, and social networking are performed all day long.
6. *the self-seeking idealists*: this group is explorative and anti-mainstream: they want to be 'different', which is shown by different clothes, behaviour and identity. They are creative and social, and have a low media usage related to television, gaming and the internet. Music is very popular though.

*Photo: Sikkema (2009)*



## Leisure activities - television

This subsection gives an overview of one of the most popular leisure activity: watching television. Watching television is, and has been, a very popular activity for youth. In recent years though, television has lost some of its share to internet and gaming.

Television is the most popular leisure activity for the younger age groups (12-14), and is pushed from its first place by the internet for the older population (15-19). In addition, the television is no longer used to watch 'passively': more and more, youngsters use the internet to watch specific programs (e.g. Uitzending Gemist), to download series and movies, and to plan their television activities (Sikkema 2009, CBS 2010c).

In 2008, 40% of the youngsters watched 10 to 20 hours of television per week, and 20% watched 20 hours or more (CBS 2010c). More than 90% of the youngsters watched television at least once per week, with an average of 80 minutes per day for age 12-14, and 78 minutes for 15-19 (Sikkema 2009). Another study (Dorsselaer et al. 2007) shows an average of 3.0 hours per day for secondary school students, with even higher averages for VMBO-students. Most popular channels for 12-14 are Nickelodeon, Jetix and RTL 4; 15-19 favor RTL4, MTV and SBS6 (Sikkema 2009).

### Relevant publications:

- Trimbos-instituut, *HBSC 2005, 2007* (in Dutch)
- Paul Sikkema, *Jongeren 2009, 2009* (in Dutch)
- CBS, *Landelijke Jeugdmonitor Rapportage 2e kwartaal 2010, 2010* (in Dutch)

## Leisure activities - internet

Almost all youngsters (>99%) in the Netherlands use the internet at least once per week; age 12-14 spends an average of 73 minutes per day, age 15-19 as much as 100 minutes (Sikkema 2009). A study directed purely at secondary school students showed an even higher average, namely 2.6 hours per day, with 3.0 hours for VMBO-students (Dorsselaer et al., 2007). The most popular activities on the internet are instant messaging (MSN messenger), social networking (Hyves), and listening to music and watching movies (YouTube).

Please note, games are not included in this category.

### Relevant publications:

- Haan and van 't Hof, *Jaarboek ICT en Samenleving 2006*, 2006
- SCP, *Nieuwe links in het gezin*, 2007
- CBS, *Jaarrapport 2009 Landelijke Jeugdmonitor*, 2009 (in Dutch)
- Paul Sikkema, *Jongeren 2009*, 2009 (in Dutch)
- CBS, *Landelijke Jeugdmonitor Rapportage 2e kwartaal 2010*, 2010 (in Dutch)
- de Haan and Pijpers, *Contact! Children and new media*, 2010 (in Dutch)

Free translation from: SCP, *Nieuwe links in het gezin*, 2007

### Computer access

Boys and VMBO-students more often have a console and computer on their private room than girls and HAVO and VWO-students. (..) The VMBO-student is often the person in the family who uses the computer most often, and perhaps the computer has been specifically acquired for this person.

### Computer usage

When youngsters use the internet to search for information, they mostly look for music, movies and television. The most popular computer activities are e-mail, 'just browsing', gaming and 'downloading music'; approximately three out of four teenagers does this on a weekly basis or more often.

Boys are highly represented in the group gamers and downloaders (of music and movies), while girls use the computer more often for homework. There is also a relation between educational level and computer usage: VMBO-students use the computer more often for entertainment activities, while VWO-students use it for information. In addition, mostly VMBO-students create drawings and edit photos on the computer; this is among others because they more often have their own website, where they use those pictures.

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### **Instant messaging**

Youngsters use the instant messaging program MSN messenger often and at length; only 5% of the teenagers does not. (..) The quantity of the contacts via MSN is for teenagers probably more important than the quality. (..) More than two third of the teenagers uses MSN at least once per day, and mostly for more than one hour per use. Girls and VMBO-students use MSN even more often and longer than boys and HAVO and VWO-students. (..) Especially VMBO-students have many contacts in their list, and many contacts with whom they have regular contact. (..)

MSN is mostly used to make plans with friends (96%), to stay in touch with distant friends (92%), and to talk about homework (88%). (..) Around 50% of the youngsters uses a webcam while chatting; not only for the enjoyment of seeing each other, but also to notice social signals, and thus to reduce the chance of misunderstandings. Girls and VMBO-students use a webcam most often.

### **Social networking**

MSN is not the only intensive medium for youngsters to be in contact with each other; websites are also used to stay in touch and to meet new people. Four sorts of websites are popular: first of all the online photoalbum (45%) and the profile site (36%). Girls have these websites more often than boys. On such sites, they can experiment with their identity and explore different ways of self-presentation. Lower percentages of youngsters maintain a weblog (10%) or a homepage (15%). In general, VMBO-students have those four websites more often, conforming with the creative photo activities.

For teenagers, the impression they make on others is very important, which is also the focus of profile sites. The impact of peer reactions is large: studies show that youngsters with mostly positive reactions have a higher self-esteem than youngsters with mostly negative ones.

### **Conclusion**

The social life of youngsters expands itself via the internet. The virtual world has no geographic restrictions, and creates unlimited possibilities for creating and maintaining social contacts. The social networks of youngsters are larger, more open and more visible through the internet. In contact lists and social network sites, friends, family and colleagues come together, integrating the different domains. The division between private and public, work and home, school and leisure time is fading. (..) In addition, youngsters can model and exhibit their identity as they wish, by means of a digital profile.

## Leisure activities - gaming

Games are popular, be it on the internet, consoles, or mobile devices. For age 12-16, the exact numbers are unclear, since studies differ in their definition of gaming. Some exclude the internet, while others exclude mobile phones, etc.

Sikkema (2009) reports casual games, mobile games, computer and console games, for an average of 52 minutes per day for age 12-14, and 38 minutes for age 15-19. HBSC (2007) on the other hand reports 1.7 hours per day for all secondary school students (2,5 hours for boys, 0.9 for girls). NICAM (2003) reports one to two hours per day on average, depending on the educational level of the parents. The true averages will probably be somewhere in the middle, but it is clear that gaming is popular; almost every youngster plays games on a regular basis.

Games are, for most youngsters, a social activity. This occurs through direct social contact, for example when playing on the Wii, together with friends, parents or grandparents. Cooperative or competitive social interaction via the internet is also common, varying from small teams to thousands of players acting simultaneously.

### Relevant publications:

- NICAM, *Computerspellen in het gezin*, 2003 (in Dutch)
- Trimbos-instituut, *HBSC 2005, 2007* (in Dutch)
- IVO, *Videogames en Nederlandse Jongeren*, 2008 (in Dutch)
- Paul Sikkema, *Jongeren 2009, 2009* (in Dutch)
- de Haan and Pijpers, *Contact! Children and new media*, 2010 (in Dutch)
- Kennisnet, *Wat weten we over... Effecten van Games*, 2010 (in Dutch)

Based on: Kennisnet, *Wat weten we over... Effecten van Games*, 2010 (in Dutch)

Almost 80% of the Dutch secondary school youth plays games on a regular basis. More than 50% of the youngsters plays offline games (55%) or a simple browsergame (55%) on the internet. About a third plays complex online multiplayer games, like Runescape or World of Warcraft. This sort of online games does require more time: on average 12 hours per week. (..)

Cited from: Jansz and Nikken, *Games, in Contact!*

*Contact! Children and new media* gives an overview of the playing behaviour of children from 6-12; since this behaviour has similarities to that of age 12-16, we cite the most important sections here.

“Recent research has shown that the average child aged between 6 and 12 years regularly plays a game, and increasingly often online. (..) The survey published by Stichting Mijn Kind Online (My Child Online Foundation) early in 2009, showed that *all children* (100%) between the ages of 6 and 12 played so-called ‘casual’ games on the internet (for example, Bejeweled). More than 40% of the children play the more complicated online multiplayer games, such as Runescape and World of Warcraft.

However, besides the internet, other platforms are also still popular:

- game console (62%);
- handheld (70%);
- PC (56%);
- mobile phones (14%).

(..)

The parents who took part in the first extensive Dutch study (see above) estimate that their children aged between 6 and 9 play slightly longer than one hour per day. For the 10- to 12-year-olds this was *almost two hours*. The figures coincide with more recent research.

One usually thinks of boys playing games but all research has shown that girls up to the age of 12 are also enthusiastic players. Boys of this age do, however, play more games and more often than girls. There are signs that it is especially the frequency that differs: the average boy plays every day while the average girl plays a few times per week.”

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## Leisure activities - meeting friends

Meeting friends is a very diverse category, which includes a lot of activities. Youngsters get together, and participate in activities: this can be shopping, watching movies together, visiting a party, or just general chit-chat on the corner of the street. Common element is that the activities are done while physically together.

A Belgian study groups and compares many studies about leisure time and youth (Sinnaeve et al., 2004); it becomes clear here that most of the time is spent in and around the own house or the friends' place. Walking around the neighborhood and 'just chatting' are popular activities, closely followed by 'spending time with lover'. Playing outside is reasonably popular for age 12-14, but is almost non-existing for age 15-19 (Sikkema 2009). A Dutch study (CBS, 2003) showed that on average 1.5 hour per day was spent on 'contacts with friends and family'.

Most youngsters have a group of around five friends, with whom they meet at least once per week. Most contacts have started at the school setting, although internet has a strong second place (Sinnaeve et al., 2004, Duimel and Haan, 2007).

A Dutch study among age 11-16 (Dorselaer et al., 2007) shows that ~7% of the students has no or just a few friends. Most important for the youngsters is the ability to discuss intimate and confidential matters with your friends; especially during the puberty when youngsters become more independent.

### Relevant publications:

- Sinnaeve et al., *Jeugd en vrije tijd*, in *Jeugdonderzoek belicht*, 2004

## Leisure activities - music

Music is popular; youngsters listen to music throughout the day, often in parallel to activities such as internet, traveling or doing their homework. Numbers on exact music behaviour for Dutch youngsters are rare. The American Kaiser Family Foundation (2007) reports that 75% of the 8-18 years old owns an iPod or other MP3 player. On average, youngsters spend two hours and 19 minutes per day listening to music, of which 30% is to a MP3 player, 23% to radio/computer/internet, and 12% each to cell phones and CDs (Mediapost, 2004).

If we look at Dutch youngsters, the same trends are visible: they mainly listen to music on their MP3 player, or on the computer; either to music they have downloaded or directly from YouTube. Radio, the favourite from a decade ago, is used at least once per week by 66% of the 12-14 years old, and by 75% of the 15-19s. The average daily radio listening time is 25 minutes versus 38 minutes, but these averages are 'dragged upwards' due to a small percentage of listeners that listens all day long during work (Sikkema, 2009).

Making music is done by a smaller percentage of youngsters; 15% creates music with instruments at least once per week, 7% on the computer, and 4% sings (Sikkema, 2009).

### Relevant publications:

- Paul Sikkema, *Jongeren 2009*, 2009 (in Dutch)

## Leisure activities - sport

Sport is a popular activity for most youngsters. Sport (physical education) is mandatory at the Dutch secondary schools; students at the VMBO should receive 400 classes (of 50 minutes) during the 4 years of their education (OCW, 2002), which is on average 2.5 hours per school week.

### Relevant publications:

- Mulier institute, *Sportief uit je BOL?!*, 2004 (in Dutch)
- GGD Utrecht, *Jeugdmonitor Utrecht 2008-2009*, 2009 (in Dutch)
- CBS, *Landelijke Jeugdmonitor Rapportage 2e kwartaal 2010*, 2010 (in Dutch)

Based on: CBS table *Gezondheid, leefstijl, gebruik van zorg*, 2010

The CBS reports, that in 2009 youngsters from 12 to 18 spent 295 minutes on average on sport per week. In total, they spent 1515 minutes on physical activity, of which 1002 light, 481 medium, and 32 heavy intensity. 28% of the youngsters conformed to the NNGB (Dutch norm for healthy behaviour, at least one hour of medium intensity movement per day).

Based on: CBS, *Landelijke Jeugdmonitor Rapportage 2e kwartaal 2010*, 2010

The Jeugdmonitor 2010, which summarises recent studies on sport behaviour, shows that almost nine out of ten (89%) of the 12-18 youngsters sports at least an hour per week (44% 1-4 hours per week, 45% 5 hours or more). The percentage of youngsters that sports regularly decreases with age. In general, team and solo sports are popular, duo-sports like squash are not. For boys, soccer and running are the most popular sports, while for girls swimming and aerobics top the list. Fitness is popular for both boys and girls.

Based on: GGD Utrecht, *Jeugdmonitor Utrecht 2008-2009*, 2009 (in Dutch)

The Jeugdmonitor Utrecht focuses specifically on youngsters in the city of Utrecht, and also presents data purely for VMBO students. They report that 85% of the youngsters always travels to school by bicycle or by foot (VMBO students: 73%); for 37% of them this is less than twenty minutes per day, for 28% twenty to thirty minutes, for 25% thirty to sixty minutes and for 9% more than one hour. Most youngsters sport at least two times per week one hour outside school (62%); and 67% of them are a member of a sport association or club (VMBO students: 51%).

Based on: Mulier institute, *Sportief uit je BOL?!*, 2004 (in Dutch)

The study 'Uit je Bol' focuses on MBO students, and in detail on the reasons for participating in sport activities outside school. The most important reasons are: 'to be physically active' (81%), 'to escape from work/study/responsibilities' (61%) and 'to be together with friends' (61%). The most interesting elements for sport are: 'sporting in a team' (67%), 'the fun you have during sport' (66%) and 'the competition in sport' (52%).

One in five students does not sport (anymore); 31% did quit before the age of 15, 51% at the age of 15/16 (end of VMBO). Reasons for quitting are 'not enough time due to school' (53%), 'not enough time due to (part time) job' (43%) and 'other hobbies are more enjoyable' (42%).

Picture: Sikkema (2009)



## Conclusion / Summary

This report gives an overview of VMBO youth, with a focus on leisure activities. VMBO youth are secondary school students, mostly in the age of 12-16.

This age group - adolescence - is marked by the changes and developments between childhood and adulthood. Initiated by the puberty, the adolescents develop themselves in this period on a physical, cognitive, social and emotional level.

In the life of VMBO youth, school plays an important role: a large amount of time and (social) attention is spent here.

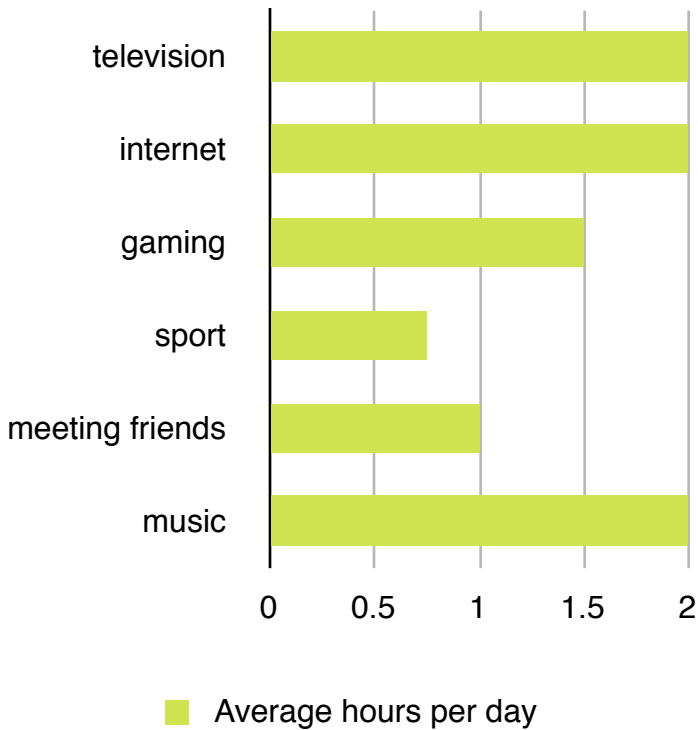
In addition, the majority of the youngsters fills their days with:

- internet: profile sites (Hyves), instant messaging (MSN), text messaging, etc
- gaming: individual, with friends, and online
- sport
- television
- meeting friends (face-to-face and via digital media)
- music

On average, the VMBO youth has 6 hours of leisure time per day. The following diagram shows the most popular leisure activities. Those activities are often performed in parallel to each other: for example, youngsters watch television, while listening to music, and chatting on MSN messenger.

Naturally, those averages are just 'averages'. The actual time spent on each activity depends on the individual youngster, the gender, the age, and other factors. Some youngsters focus almost purely on sport, while others prefer television and gaming. The actual hours per day differ; the fact remains that almost all youngsters spent a lot of time on those six activities.

### Leisure activities for youngsters



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