

BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

DOCTORAL (PhD) DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

***THE EFFECTS OF ORGANISED PHYSICAL EXERCISES
PRACTICING ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE***

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1. Reason of the topic choice

The efforts to increase physical activity are at the forefront of public health research, especially in the western countries, because the benefits of a healthy lifestyle go far beyond physical and mental well-being. However, the majority of these efforts focus on explicit motivation - the external factors that lead to a change in behavior. But explicit motivational processes are often unsuccessful in causing changes that people can easily maintain long-term.

One of the important values promoted in the European countries, one of the vital goals of the government is to improve the lifestyle and health care of people (CCPS, 1996; Coakley, Dunning, 2006; *White Paper on Sport*, 2007). But in efforts to achieve this goal, it is necessary to have trained persons, motivated society and/or individuals. This situation requires an expansive support of sports not in terms of money only. Although there has been increased sociological and psychological research and policy attention given to the effects that physical activity has on quality of life among citizens, there is a lack of consistency surrounding the use of this term. As a result, attempts to examine what causes change in quality of life have been limited. We try to critically review the literature on sociology of sport and physical activity, and quality of life in the western societies and Romania. In so doing, attention is given to both quality of life by social backgrounds as a social-economical outcome represented by the core dimensions of health status or economical-related quality of life as well as a psychological construct represented by life satisfaction. The literature is also examined to identify potential mediators and moderators in the physical activity and quality-of-life relationship. Discussion of possible mediating variables reinforces the important role of perception when considering the beneficial effects that physical activity has on quality of life.

2. Background of the thesis

The main *literature* used in the thesis, by *domains of interests* is shown below:

- A) Concern disciplinary complexity and actuality of themes about sport and sportification: *Cultura fizică - fenomen social* (A. Georgescu, 1976), *Semnificația sportului pentru societate. Impactul sportului asupra sănătății* (CCPS, 1996), *Sport. A Critical Sociology* (R. Giulianotti, 2005), *Handbook of Sports Studies* (eds. J. Coakley, E. Dunning, 2006), *Sportul*

- *fenomen social*, (E.F. Grosu, 2008a), *The Built Environment and Health: Introducing Individual Space-Time Behavior* (D. Saarloos et al., 2009), *Social capital in Europe. Measurement and social regional distribution of a multifaced phenomenon* (Van Oorschot, Arts, Gelissen, 2006);
- B) Postmodernist effects and the values of healthism to the social behaviour: *The Body in Consumer Culture* (M. Featherstone, 1991), *Quest for excitement. Sport and leisure in the civilizing process* (eds. N. Elias, E. Dunning, 1986), *The Antidepressant Era* (D. Healy, 1997), *Schooling Bodies in New Times: The Reform of School Physical Education in High Modernity* (D. Kirk, 1997), *Societatea monocromă* (A. Etzioni, 2002);
- C) The importance of motivational climate and psychological mechanisms involved in practicing of physical exercises: *Social foundations of thought and actions: A social cognitive theory* (A. Bandura, 1986), *Relapse situations and self-efficacy: An integrative model* (W. Velicer et al., 1990), *Motivation in sport and exercise* (G. Roberts, 1992), *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control* (A. Bandura, 1997), *Sport psychology* (L. Wankel, 2000), *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences* (eds. D. Baltes și N. Smelser, 2001), *Psihologie socială și sociopsihologie. Teme recurente și noi viziuni* (Iluț, 2009), *Valori, atitudini și comportamente sociale* (Iluț, 2004), *Cross cultural generalizability of the theory of planned behavior among young people in a physical activity context* (M. Hagger et al., 2007), *Physical Activity Relationship (PAR)* (P. Koski, 2008).

First, I try to summarize the theoretical background on sociology of sport, the classification and conceptualisations concern the most important subjects: the place and the role of sport in contemporary society, sport functions, theoretical points in sociology of sport (conflictualist theory, functionalist paradigm, constructivism and postmodernism), the intersection of different domains focused on sport as social phenomenon: psychology, cultural anthropology, and other domains in sportive phenomenon approach.

Second, I expose some studies focused on sport integration in lifestyle, relation between quality of life and physical exercises, and between objective and subjective well-being and sport practice.

As a implicit idea, the entire construction of the thesis emerge on the triplet: Sport (physical exercises) – Education – Lifestyle (not necessarily in this order). Both theoretical and empirical effort try to discover some ways to promote or encourage physical activity on young

and adult population from our country. It's a motivational and educational matter, but also is a objective, socioeconomical one. Between lifestyle and economical possibilities, the ties are very strong.

I try to describe the procesuality of sport as social phenomenon, follow the dynamics of individual and social components (figure 1):

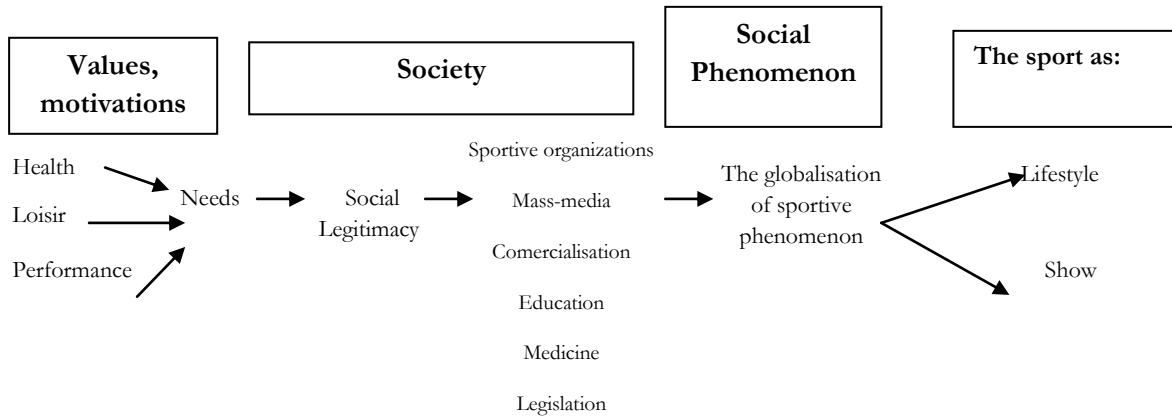
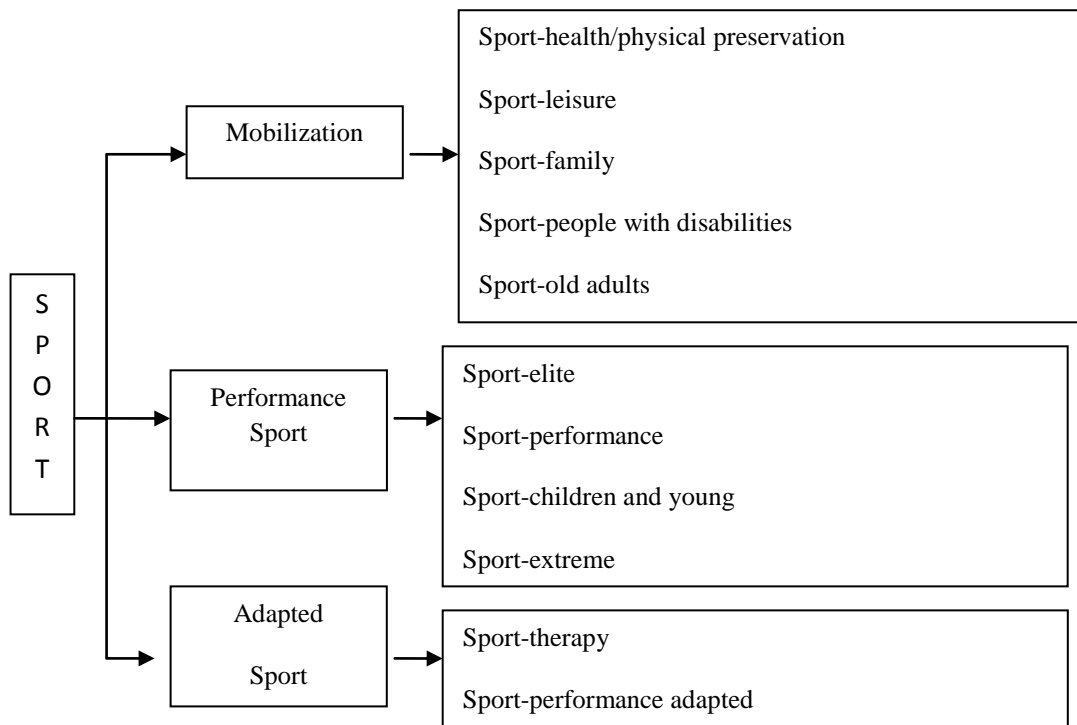


Fig. 1. The sport as social phenomenon process, by components

In figure 2 is expose the *diversity of sport-related notions*, used in our thesis (Dragnea, Teodorescu-Mate, 2002, cf. Roman și Batali, 2007, p. 29).



In the second chapter I analyze the term *quality of life* as a manifestation of man's self-realization within the framework of contemporary civilizational development and reaches the conclusion that sport turns into an indispensable, universal element of self-realization. The results is that this is connected with the revaluation of the body as a universal asset, permitting the fuller, richer and more all-round experience of the world.

The studies concern self improvement and self-esteem maintains that people's aspirations towards achieving self-realization will make sport change its content and its functions. We, as Romanians, will have to adjust not only to new technology but also to the cultural emancipation that is taking place, to the changing inter-human relations, to the new dimensions of our society. This causes changes in the quality of sport itself, marked on the one hand by a tendency towards more and more far-reaching rationalization and intellectualization and on the other hand towards an increase in ludic elements in sport, in conditions, where the growth of leisure time will exert its influence on the increase of leisure pursuits and the culture of play as an essential factor in the shaping of the quality of life.

In the first instance, the western researches had shown that exercise and physical activity have a long-term effect on important aspects of psychosocial functioning because of the fact that exercise can influence our quality of life, self-esteem and self-efficacy. In the second hand, there is a growing awareness of the strong relationship between quality of life and physical activity, especially in young development and third age life. However, much of this researches seems to indicate that there is a direct link between the two. Our work takes this approach, and is well supported by the data, that exercise and physical activity improve our quality of life. Other convergent studies examined the roles played by health status, physical activity and self-efficacy in determining "global quality of life," or satisfaction with life among the adult generation. The results show that is a trend among adults with lower income and health problems to give up: they recognize the benefits of sport activities, but they not translate this dea in daily behaviour.

From a public health perspective, understanding what may cause change in quality of life has significant implications for the design, implementation, and promotion of physical activity programs for children, young, and adults. In addition to the physical health measures, a physically active lifestyle is positively associated with components of mental health as well. The systematical investigations, exposed in chapter three, found that the group with higher physical activity levels had higher values in all of the domains of health and social skills, connecting

quality of life to social integration (cooperation, developing social network and social capital, tolerance, sociability) and mental health (i.e., vitality, social functioning, role limitations due to emotional health, and mental health) than their more sedentary counterparts.

With respect to some research made on this subject we can declare that sport in an inalienable part of our life that can balance the negative aspects of society. The specifically institutional and political leaders should exploit the opportunities given by sports.

3. The general objectives, methodology, and population of research

Physical inactivity is a major public health concern, not just in western countries, but also in emergent ones. Vulnerable sectors associated with lowest levels of leisure time activity include those with low levels of education and income. There are limited theoretically based qualitative studies exploring participation in physical activity and sport. Our research try established what is the motivational picture, to understand perceptions of physical activity, the motivational degree on this issue, among two categories of Cluj county individuals: young and adults, and to provide information for further development of a physical activity improvement. Because any effective health promotion necessitates an understanding of target populations, we adopt an integrative research to obtain more relations between variables and detailed informations.

The first research, a quantitative one, take place in six secondary schools and six lyceums from Cluj county, intended to find what are the younger’s opinions toward practicing physical exercises, the benefits and difficulties among them. We selected two type of population, in equal representation: the category who practice different kind of sports, and one who not practice sport, except in the formal physical education classes. The total population is 277 young students (under 19 years old). The structure of population is presented in picture below:

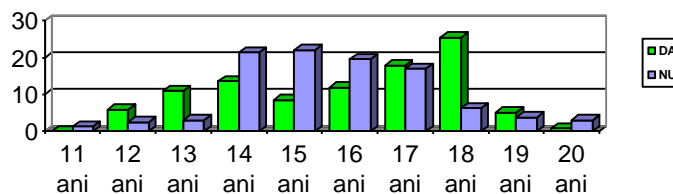


Fig. 3. Distribution by age and type of physical exercises practiced (organized / just in class)

On questionnaire, we had focused on differences between different sociodemographic variables as age, residence, educational level and income of parents, sport tradition in family (parents, brothers), type of school (gymnasium-lyceum, sport-oriented or not). Our general goal was to obtain a picture of this opinions related with sports effects on health and on development of social relations skills by sport practice, at this segment of age.

The second research, have use the interview technique, who has applied on a 171 sample, theoretical representative, of adult populations from Cluj-Napoca.

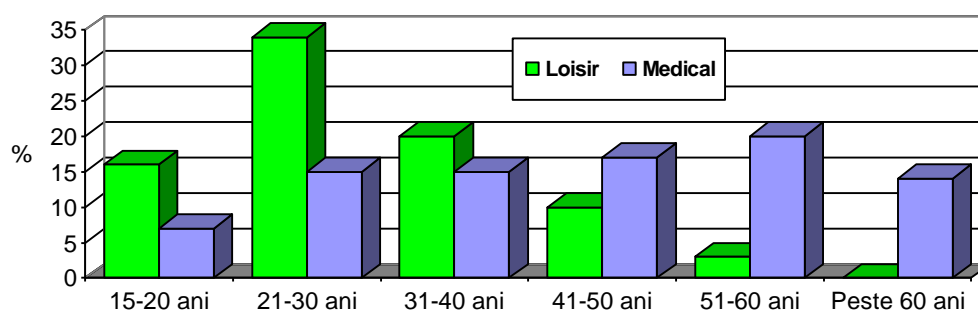


Fig. 4. Distribution by age and by the reasons in physical exercises practice

The questionnaire (with open and close questions) is focused on lifestyle issues in relation with physical activity: quality of life, enjoyment, relaxation, social-economic background of individuals, family and friendship context (social network), future plans in lifestyle changes, as determinants of physical activity relationship. Psychological theories facilitating conceptualization of the adoption and maintenance of physical activity include self-efficacy theory, the theory of motivation and the theory of rational choice. Among others variables, research has focused on the motivational influences of lifestyle who include sports on a regular base.

To obtain the triangulation principle in researcher analysis, I conduct the analyze of results by four **interviews with specialists** (in physiology of sport and experienced teachers from Physical Education and Kinetics-therapy Departments from Cluj-Napoca and Oradea University). The first goal of this third instrument is to hear others voices (interpretations) of some relevant data. The second is to find opinions about the tendencies, specifically Romanian's realities, and possible solutions (at institutional level, organizational agency or by individual initiative) toward improving the physical exercises situation among our citizens.

4. Results and discussions

Findings of both research revealed that greater degrees of contentedness within the individual, and with the local social and physical environment indicate a higher likelihood of being physically active.

The results of first research suggested that the motivational tendencies among the young subjects are concentrated around several factors relating residents' competence and confidence with physical activity were identified. Positive factors included mental wellbeing, mood regulation and increased energy levels. Negative factors included social and familial backgrounds, a perceived lack of ability on the part of not regularly active subjects and more generally, feelings of intimidation/lack of interests associated with gyms or exercise classes. Concerns about body weight and attire were dominant among girls, whilst men were conscious of competitive atmospheres. Positive and negative factors were evident where physical activity was incorporated into daily schedules, but similarly induced feelings of guilt or compulsion. Encouraging features of social interaction and involvement included enjoyment, group based activity, social interaction, family and friend supports. De-motivating aspects included pressure to perform and clique environments.

Most individuals noted a lack of local possibilities to practice regular sports and a lack of information pertaining to activities, whilst a minority felt that there was sufficient information if sought. In the figure 5 is shown the results at this issue:

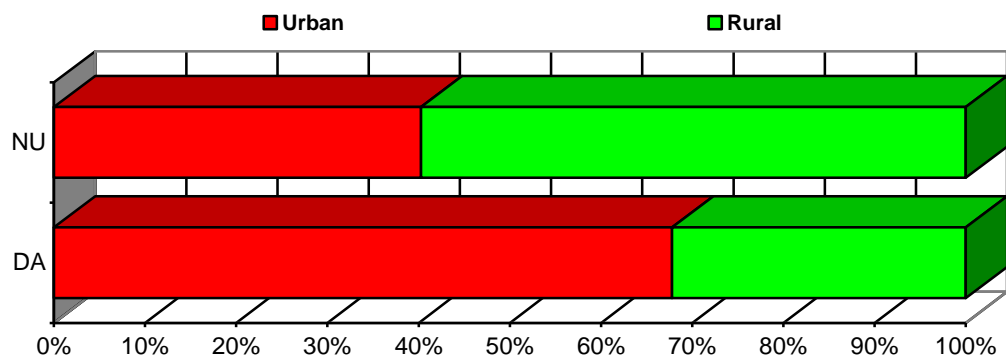


Fig. 5. Distribution by residence and sport practice on regular basis

These views were related to the general view that there are insufficient facilities, and the contrasting minority view that activities are organised but are not accessed by the population. Playing football or make aerobic at home was the activity of choice for most young people who

live in rural area, which may reflect a lack of facilities for other forms of physical activity, and may also be influenced by the minimal competency required.

Positive findings relating to young' competence and confidence are consistent with documented health/physiological and psychological benefits of physical activity on health and quality of life. Their opinions may also reflect public confusion about health messages regarding levels of activity needed to maintain health, a lack of family and social environment education oriented on sport. In addition, they may reflect societal standards placing emphasis on outer appearance, dictating a fit body as the ideal. Rather than comply with unattainable social expectations for physical activity performance, people may choose to abstain. For example, a 'performance' climate is one where class participants are compared, anxiety is felt about making mistakes and praise is given for superior performance. Such a climate may be exacerbated between peers from 'close knit' localities such as the study groups. Indeed the young viewed cliques as unconstructive since they increased feelings of intimidation or lack of interest. Present day consumer culture which fosters unrealistic standards for physical appearance may also be influential again here.

Motivation to comply with perceived expectations of others is defined as subjective norm within the theory of planned behaviour. This model is a useful predictor of physical activity. In the current study, subjective norm appeared to influence subjects ability to engage in activity which may relate to the cohesive nature of the sportive groups. Although the literature reports smaller effect sizes between subjective norms and intentions than for other constructs, subjective norms may be more influential in peer-groups with low migration (like in rural areas). The possible influence of subjective norms on physical activity engagement in such groups is worthy of further investigation.

Enjoyment was an important motivating aspect of physical activity which is supported by the literature. Another motivator was social support and models. Residents indicated that this can be obtained from significant others. Friendship and family support has been shown to influence physical activity. Indeed physical activity counselling support has been shown to be effective. Having supportive others to talk, ask questions or receive honest feedback is critical to initiating and maintaining behaviour change, especially at young age. In this study, lack of supports meant young felt less in control of their ability to do regular activity.

One related issue here is the low level of family income, and in relation with, the interpretation with rational choice theory. Families who are under resourced do not have the same opportunities for leisure and other 'risk' factors as those with higher levels of resources. The situation of education (usually strong related with incomes in the student's families) are described in the figure 6.

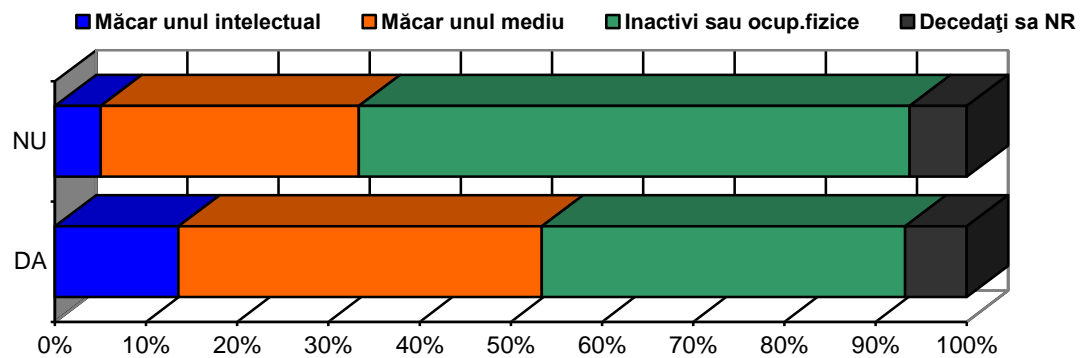


Fig. 6. Distribution by parents occupation and sport practice on regular basis

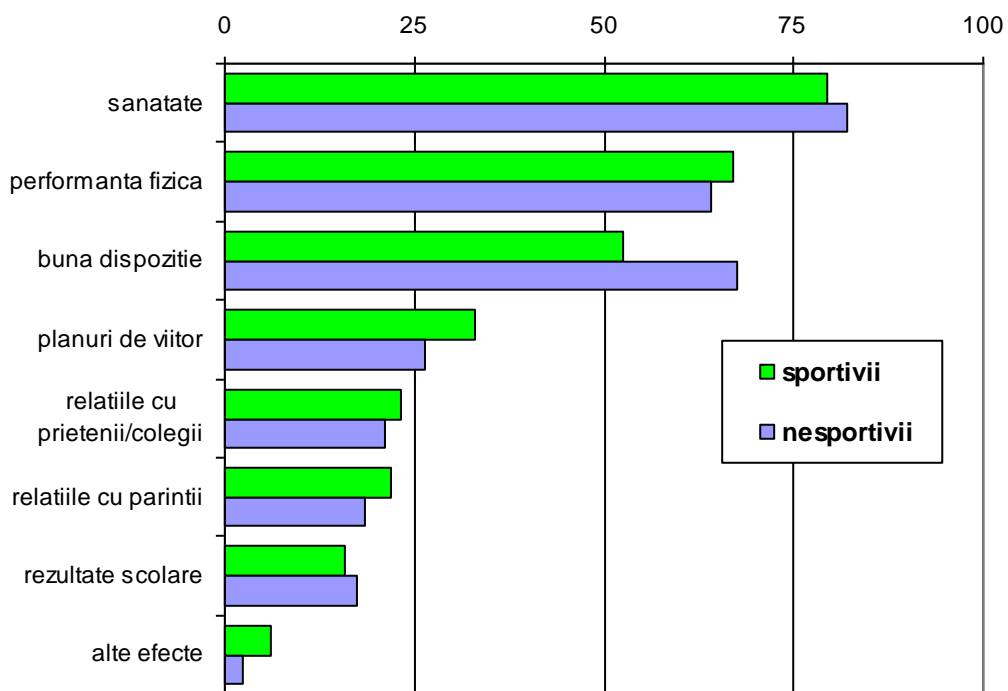


Fig. 7. „Sportive” ans „unsportive” students: sports practicing effects - *in the first place have positive effects in:*

There is an urgency to address physical inactivity within socially excluded young people. Integration of physical activity with daily life is a public health goal incorporating the need for

personal discipline. In the same time, the group 'motivational climates' may influence physical activity.

The results of second research conduct to the idea that the adults have the conscience of the benefits of physical activities. They tend to show the correct order of advantages to ne physsically active in maintaining of a healthy life, as is shown in figure 8.

If individuals are content personally, socially and within their physical environment, then they are more open to declare and being physically active. Psycho-social influences on physical activity included self-efficacy, social pressure and expectations and social support. Physical environmental determinants included access to facilities and amenities together with availability of clean areas for walking and recreation. One serious reason for phisical activities is medical issue. The family income is one other factor. One other factor taked in analysis is 'motivational climates', who may influence physical activity.

In the context of physical activity, health promoters need to be conscious of the difficulties that individuals feel in relation to bodily appearance and the pressure to comply with societal standards. This may be particularly relevant in low income settings where insufficient allocation of resources and social supports means that individuals have less opportunity to attend to physical activity than individuals living in higher income settings.

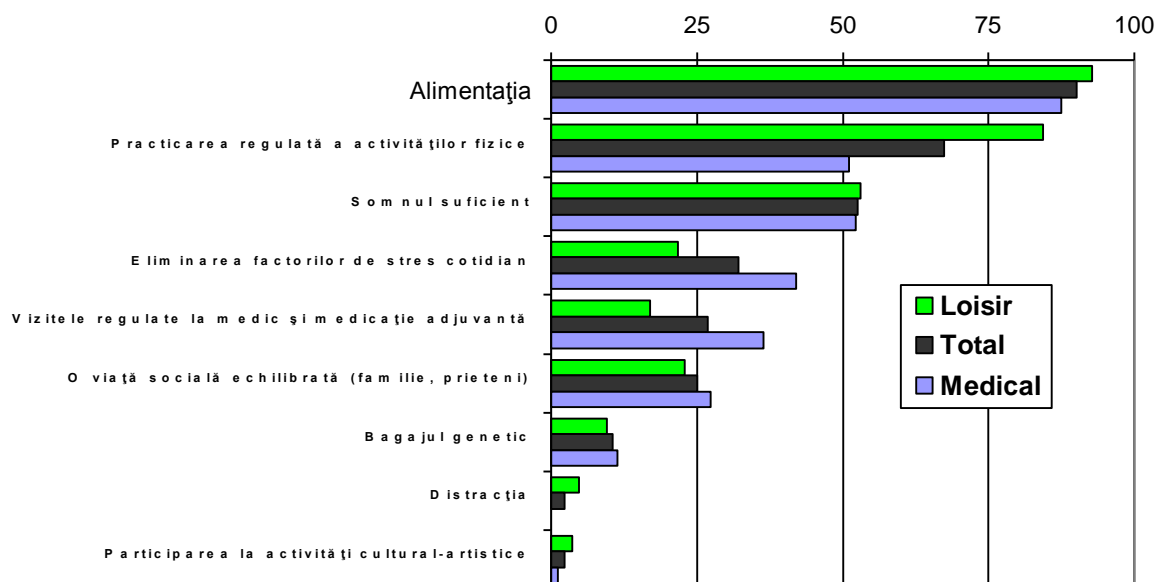


Fig. 8. Most important elements for a healthy life, by type of physical activities

But on the same time, the responses on concrete lifestyle of the subjects show a different picture

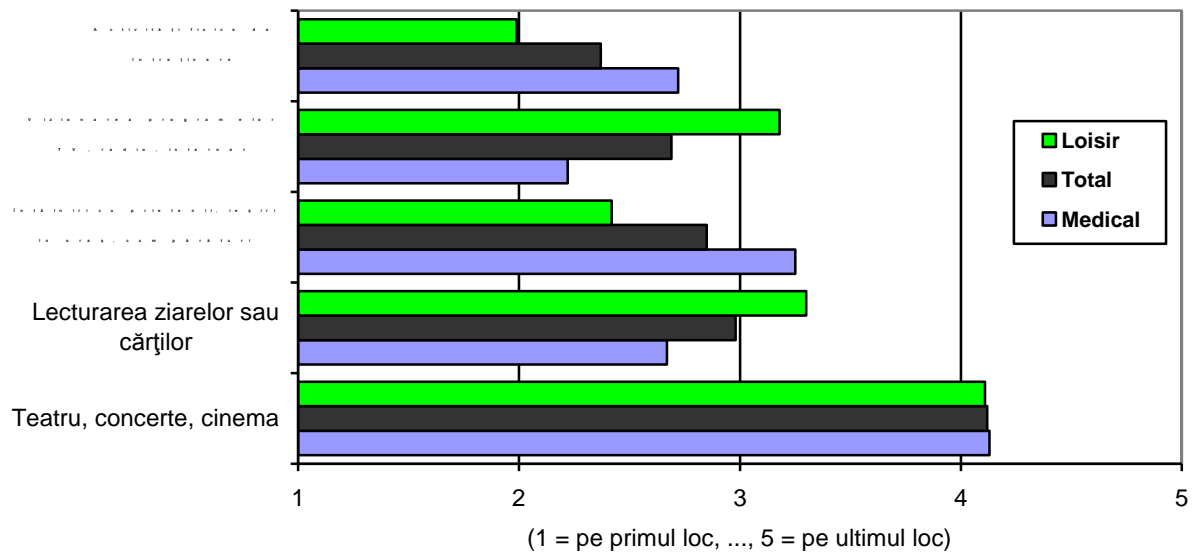


Fig. 9. The hierarchy of loisir activities, by type of physical activities

Here it's also a matter of basic needs, in terms of theory of motivation based on Hierarchical Needs Theory (Maslow, 1970).

Limitations of the research

There are several study limitations. Since it involved residents from Cluj-Napoca, the results cannot be generalized. Neither can selection bias be ruled out. Those who agreed to take part in the groups did so because they had the time and the disponibility. Researcher bias cannot be ruled out since the researcher have professional interests in health and physical exercises promotion. Despite efforts to remain objective and to allow the participants' to direct discussions towards issues of personal relevance, this may have impacted upon the results. Categories were cross-checked for coding and interpreted by four independent researchers to assess their relevance with the data. It may also have been useful to use respondent validation since respondents reactions to emerging findings can help to refine explanations.

Conclusions – Physical Activity Relationship model in research results

Physical activity relationship (PAR) is a concept by which sport and physical activities are approached as a cultural part of life to which all of us have a relationship. We live in many different social worlds at the same time and we have different roles in these social worlds. We can be strangers, tourists, regulars or insiders. The deeper we are involved in a certain social world the better we see and understand the meanings of this world. Sport and physical activities can be conceptualized as such a social world. The relationship which describes how we encounter this world and its culture is referred to here as PAR. Our results suggests that although there is clear interest in *personal physical activity* by the field of sport and exercise science, PAR also covers three other dimensions: *following*, *producing* and *consuming* the meanings of sport and physical activities. Arguably, the PAR framework may be able to offer insights for those seeking to establish sport, exercise and physical activity as fundamental aspects of a healthy lifestyle and core feature of contemporary identity formation. With regard to promotion of physical activity, health professionals face a challenge in generating balance in the midst of a consumer culture focused on bodily appearance. When considering the determinants of physical activity it is important to remain conscious of the pressures faced by individuals in this context. More work is required to develop theoretical frameworks informing health promotion interventions, programmes and campaigns.

Finally, we try to construct an adapted model to the results of our research among adults subjects, in which we find a configuration of types in the relation with physical activity. In the distribution of types, we take in quantitative analysis the relevant variables on lifestyle connected with physical activity and sport: frequency, the period of practicing, reasons of sport practicing on a regular basis and elements of individual lifestyle.

Table 1. PAR types in our research (loisir population)

Types of relations with physical activity	Dominance of types
<i>Participant as tourist</i>	44 %
<i>Participant as regular</i>	35 %
<i>Participant as insider</i>	14 %
<i>Participant as stranger</i>	7 %

In searching of dimensions of relation with physical activity, I find one interesting and encouraging distribution, concentrated in the Table 2.

Table 2. PAR dimensions in research results

Dimensions of relationship with physical activity	Dominance of dimensions
<i>Adherence to physical activity</i> (tourists, regular and a part of insiders)	60 %
<i>Semnifications consumers</i> (tourists, strangers and a part of regulars)	26%
<i>Producers of physical activity</i> (insiders)	14%

We had mentioned also the idea that health and sport as a lifestyle promoters need to be mindful of balance in this context given the current tendency towards 'healthism'. Societies' emphasis on appearance and pressure to conform to contemporary ideals has been translated into activities such as dieting, exercise, 'weight watching', obstructionizing the competition, sport-orientated values, the well-being benefits of physical exercises on a regular basis.

But the central idea of relation between quality of life and sport practicing is toward of any doubts: integration of physical activity with daily life is a public health goal incorporating the need for personal discipline. In the same time, it's obviously that group 'motivational climates' (objective-structural, social-familial, and psychological-motivational factors) may influence physical activity.

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