

Discussion Paper



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**How does institutional environment effects
impact students' sporting habits in Central
and Eastern Europe?**

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Proposal information

According to the determinative document of health promotion, the Ottawa Charter, “*health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love*” (WHO, 1986). This statement also emphasizes the responsibility of institutions and, in our case, higher education for promoting healthy lifestyle. Moreover, the time spent in higher education is the last chance for adolescents to practice any sports activity in an organized manner on a weekly basis (Serbu, 1997; Strange, 2003; Taliaferro, Rienzo, & Donovan, 2010; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The aim of this study is to scrutinize the differences in sporting habits, sport motivations of students, and the institutional environment of practicing intense sports in higher education institutions of Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, and Serbia.

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In the theoretical background of our research, we synthesize the essence of the institutional effect. We examined the role of (higher educational) institutional environment in students' sporting habits and thus their health consciousness. The institutional effect is divided into three factors by most authors. They are formal characteristics, institutional characteristics, and environmental impacts. As Clark's (1960) concept points out, the sum of the power of the type of institution, the hidden message of the structure of the syllabus, and the appropriate communication from the instructor's side leave us with the most important impact of the institution, which can also be regarded as the oldest theory of the institutional impact. Another theory, probably the most comprehensive one, talks about the four dimensions of higher education, which are the following: the composition of the student-instructor society, the static and dynamic features of the organizational structure, the physical environment, and the institutional culture itself (Strange, 2003). According to Pusztai (2015), the institutional effect consists of an environment created by institutions that are provided by potential opportunities and the orientation and interaction of students in such directions. It is important to note that the amount of institutional contribution of certain faculties and institutions may vary in light of the social background of students. This means that the knowledge and skills that students already have when they enter higher education will not be shaped in the same way and to the same extent in different institutions and their subdivisions. Based on the theories of institutional impact, we compared the students' researched intuitions by frequency of doing sport, attitudes to sport, the role of sport activities in free time, and the answers about the reasons of not doing sports. In explanation of significant differences, we focused on the physical environment (sport infrastructure) and the institutional culture regarding sport (sport concepts, programs, and events of higher education institutions).

Methods

We use both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the quantitative part of the research, our questionnaires were answered by 2,017 students from 15 institutions in 2015; in the qualitative part, we conducted eight interviews with institution leaders responsible for sports and physical education (PE) teachers. We applied a combined, both aggregate and stratified, method of sampling. First, we stratified the population faculty by faculty and then we chose seminar groups at random and asked them to fill out our survey. Accordingly, the item numbers change faculty by faculty in proportion to their total number of students; hence, there is a higher number of items of certain faculties. In the research, we tested the frequency of practicing sports. Students could choose from six options ranging from "never" to "at least three or more times a week." The factor analysis of pastime sports activities, such as cycling, swimming, ball games, extreme sports, hiking, excursion, and games of groups (e.g., cards and bowling), concentrated into separate factors. We were also interested in why doing sports can be considered important, which we regard as a kind of motivational factor.

By factor analysis, we separate two attitudes: the competitive and the health-promoting attitude (maximum likelihood method, direct oblimin rotation, explained variance: 48.9%, KMO: 0.770). We would also like to know why students do not do sports at all or only very little: They could answer with “yes” or “no” or by stating that they were not satisfied with the sports facilities offered by the university. We compared the students with respect to sports done in an organized and institutional manner. We were curious to see the number of members of sports clubs, organizations, and groups. We used an IBM SPSS 24 program package (NY, USA), variance analysis, and a χ^2 test.

We tried to understand the patterns of institutional differences in the quantitative results through qualitative methods. In connection with the sports concept, sports options, and infrastructure of the institutions, we conducted interviews with leaders of the institutions and institutes, PE teachers, who are responsible for sports activities of the institutions, and the organization of PE lessons.

Conclusions

The conclusive finding of our research is that the sporting habits of students in higher education are obviously influenced by the institutional effect. This research has confirmed that an adequate sports infrastructure, a wide range of options, well-organized sport programs, and an institutional sports strategy can increase the amount of students' sports activities. In this respect, the sports strategy of the University of Debrecen is remarkable in the sense that it, without a doubt, increases the frequency of students doing sports. Making sports club memberships as a part of curriculum requirements is one of the solutions that drives students to spend their free time practicing sports (which is the case at Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute). The other one is the wide range of sports programs. As of late, many studies have aimed toward the exposure of the added value of institutions. During the course of these studies, the enumeration of previous and parallel effects seems to cause most of the difficulties ([Pusztai, 2015](#)).

Health promotion and health consciousness are definitely the background motivations behind students doing sports. This result gives a special meaning in light of the above-described cases of students who a lot of the time are restrained from physical activities due to health issues, principally the students of the Ukrainian institutions in Berehove and Mukachevo. We have to emphasize that the examined region is one of the most disadvantaged regions in the European Union where the rate of disadvantaged students is much higher than the EU average, and who were excluded from regular sports activities before entering university/college. Higher education institutions give them the last chance to socialize with any regular sport activity and health-conscious lifestyle as well.

Keywords: sports, students, higher education, institutional effect

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