

# Active Sport Tourism in the Hungarian Population: Current Trends and Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

In the past few decades, sport and tourism, two significant industries, have gone through a phase of rapid development. The relationship between the two fields is becoming more and more recognized by economic actors, policymakers and social scientists as well; nevertheless, there is a question of how widespread active sport tourism is in the different social groups of Hungarian society, and what the perspectives of sport tourism are as a leisure time activity in the future. The objective of the current paper is to answer these questions, based on survey research conducted in a representative sample (n=1027) of the Hungarian adult population. In the first phase of data analysis, the author focused on the following two questions: (1) What percentage of the population is engaged in doing regular physical exercise, and travelling during their holidays? (2) Is there a relationship between doing exercise and travelling? Based on the two dimensions (physical exercise and travelling) four groups could be separated, the in-depth analysis of the groups was carried out in the second phase of the data analysis. During this phase, the following questions were in focus: (1) How can the four groups be characterized concerning their socio-economic status? (2) What leisure activities are characteristic of them? (3) What can be said about the social networks of the members of these groups? (4) How can we characterize their attitudes to healthy lifestyle, and within this, sport? According to the results, the social basis of active sport tourism is not very wide. The majority of the Hungarian population is hindered by worsening living standards and worsening health levels, and by the lack of adequate knowledge about active sport tourism and the positive impact of it on the quality of life. A further problem is that although many people are familiar with the influence of lifestyle on health, and recognize the benefits of exercise in theory, in reality few people are involved in sporting activities, and for many, doing exercise is not a source of pleasure. That is why it is important that the messages referring to the positive impact of regular physical exercise reach the different social groups. In these messages, besides the often stressed health-preserving role, social and recreational aspects of sport as a leisure time activity should also be emphasized.

## KEYWORDS

sport tourism, Hungarian society, leisure time

## Introduction

In the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, distance does not seem to matter much; those

having the opportunity can travel freely and consume the experiences offered by the world (Bauman 1998). The increasingly polarized world society distinguishes between *vagabonds* and *tourists*, the latter of whom are demanding an increasing range of services on the part of the tourist industry. Tourism as a form of recreation is connected to a new lifestyle of western post-industrial and postmodern societies, constituting a pattern of healthy, pro-ecological, self-realizing and active way of spending spare time (Cynarski & Obodynski 2005). Through the tourists' transnational experience, travelling within Europe can also foster the process of europeanization that is, the formation of the European citizen (Bornemann & Fowler 1997).

Standeven and De Knop (1999) provide a definition for tourism, which implies temporary travel away from one's own home and working locality involving experiences unlike those encountered in everyday life. Tourism is created by small events, such as a bicycle trip, and longer journeys as well, even if motivations and experiences differ (Obodynski & Cynarski 2006). Today's tourists have the means to be well-informed regarding the possible destinations, the prices, and have a better understanding of the supply on offer, therefore, countries, and regions are now on more competitive terms (Orphanos 2009). After the economic crisis and the disastrous events of the recent past (terrorist attacks, epidemics) the tourist industry is facing several challenges, which require the adjustment of the tourism strategy to such kind of unpredictable conditions, and realize the importance of the subsets of tourism that are based on individual passions, commitments or hobbies, such as sport and adventure tourism (Foldesi 2004).

Broadly defined, sport tourism includes travel to participate in a sport activity, travel to observe sport, and travel to visit a sport attraction (Gibson et al. 1998). Sport tourists can also be labelled as either "hard" or "soft", a "hard" tourist being a person who travels with the intention of actively or passively participating in competitive sport, thus sport is the prime motivation for travel. A "soft" sport tourist is someone who is participating in sport in a recreational manner (Gammon & Robinson 1997). Changes in societal values, such as an increased interest in personal health and family 'togetherness', have stimulated the development of vacation products and services which focus on health and sport (Delpy 1998). With the emergence of this demand, the spheres of interest of sport and tourism overlap in several ways, which is becoming more and more recognized by economic actors, policy makers and social scientists. Sport-related tourism can have economic benefits such as fostering employment and financial profit; furthermore, there are social aspects as well, such as the formation of social networks and, in the case of active sport tourism, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

The opportunities in the relationship between sport and tourism are also emphasized in the Hungarian National Sport Strategy and the National Tourism Strategy. The Hungarian government is making efforts to promote tourism both into and within Hungary, with tenders, advertisements and a special travel cheque scheme, as part of the cafeteria system, which serves as a supplement to wages. Despite the fact that tourism, and within this active sport tourism, is encouraged by policymakers, little has been discovered about the actual sport tourists and the potential target groups of sport tourism.

### **Objectives and Methods**

The objectives of the current paper are to investigate how widespread active sport tourism is in the different social groups of Hungarian society, and to analyze the prospects of sport tourism as a leisure time activity for the future. Data were collected by survey method in a representative sample

(n=1027) of the Hungarian population in December 2007.<sup>1</sup> The random and stratified sample was selected in the following steps. In the first phase of the sampling, settlements were selected from each region of Hungary, and then the number of respondents from a settlement was calculated based on the population-ratios of settlement-types (capital city/Budapest, regional centres, smaller towns, villages) in the given region. In the third phase, the households were selected randomly, and then in the selected household, the targeted respondent was selected according to the Leslie Kish-key. In order to make the sample representative of the population according to gender, age group, status of residence and qualification, the sample was weighted. The data were processed using the SPSS for Windows 10.0 software, and as a result of this sampling method, conclusions drawn can be accepted as valid for the whole population (within the margins of statistical error).

In the first phase of data analysis, the author focused on the following two questions:

(1) What percentage of the population is engaged in doing regular physical exercise, and travelling during their holidays?

(2) Is there a relationship between doing exercise and travelling?

Based on the two dimensions (physical exercise and travelling) four groups could be separated, the in-depth analysis of the groups was carried out in the second phase of the data analysis. During this phase, the following questions were in focus:

(1) How can the four groups be characterized according to their socio-economic status?

(2) What leisure activities are characteristic of them?

(3) What can be said about the social networks of the members of these groups?

(4) How can we characterize their attitudes to healthy lifestyle, and within this, sport?

The in-depth analysis of the four groups allowed the author to make conclusions in accordance with the questions below.

(1) Which social groups are already involved in active sport tourism?

(2) What can be the reasons for the exclusion of certain other groups?

(3) How can the different groups be targeted by and included in the sport tourist movement?

## Results

Concerning the population's physical activity, it can be said that nearly half of the Hungarian population does no physical exercise at all. Approximately one third of those not doing any sport revealed that although they are not engaged in regular physical exercise, they do go walking or hiking. As for the participation in tourist activities, it has to be mentioned that 53% of the respondents spent no nights away from home in order to have a rest, and another 30% took a less than 10-day holiday trip in the previous year. For another question, 57.4% indicated that in the past three years they spent no holiday involving travelling. This reflects the fact that there exists a section of the population for whom the holiday spent with travelling is an unavailable alternative. The frequency of travelling seems to decrease with age; 37.9% of people between 18 and 29 travelled nowhere for their holidays, whereas the corresponding ratio for the 62+ age group is 78.5%. In addition to the age differences, the other defining factor seems to be socio-economic status; and within this, the most significant dimension is educational qualification, as less than one fifth of those in the lowest qualified group, but on the other hand almost three quarters of the highest qualified group, went on holiday to have a rest in

<sup>1</sup> Data collection was sponsored by the Hungarian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and was carried out by the TÁRKI Social Research Institute.

the past three years (Figure 1).

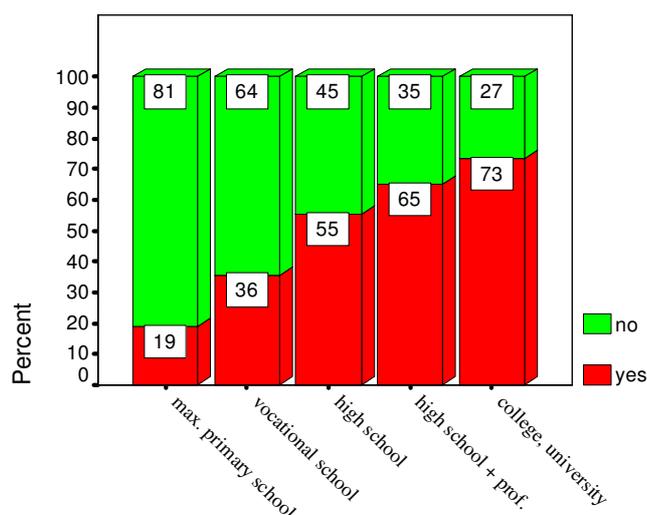


Figure 1. Travelling on holiday in the past three years with respect to educational level (%)

As opposed to lower-status groups, the middle class is much more active, and for them, besides fares, improving the standard and increasing the range of services can also be crucial. In the case of the low-income households, affordable leisure services need to be offered, as they appear to be hindered by their financial opportunities.

As for the relationship between sporting activity and tourism, activities in the two areas are marked by some coincidence. The data revealed that the share of those active or inactive in both dimensions (homogeneous groups) is two thirds, whereas the share of physically inactive travellers and active non-travellers is approximately one third. The groups are presented below in Table 1, with the over-represented social groups indicated.

Table 1. Physical activity and travelling in the Hungarian society

	Physically inactive (Less than 1-2 times a week)	Physically active
<b>Never Travels (Has not been on holiday for the past 3 years)</b>	I. 29%	II. 26%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People over age 62: 51.4%</li> <li>• People with lower qualification: 55.4%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People living in regional centres: 32.1%</li> <li>• People with vocational qualification: 32.6%</li> </ul>
<b>Travellers</b>	III. 10%	IV. 35%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30-45 age group: 15.9%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18-29 age group: 52.1%</li> <li>30-45 age group: 53.2%</li> <li>Secondary + vocational qualification: 52.3%</li> <li>Degree holders: 63.4%</li> </ul>

*Group profiles*

The data suggest that members of Group 1 are excluded from participation in active sport tourism, as they are physically inactive, and do not go on holiday either. The in-depth analysis of the

group revealed the most important factors behind their exclusion:

- Financial difficulties (83%) (Figure 2)
- Poor health condition (38%)
- Loneliness (33%)
- Inactive, monotonous leisure activities ( $\approx 80\%$ )
- The lack of taking individual responsibility for health ( $\approx 50\%$ ) (Figure 3)
- Negative attitudes to sport (94%) (Figure 4.)

Based on the above-mentioned facts, the inclusion of the group in active sport tourism can only be successful with affordable products, which are advertised through television. However, this must also be preceded by a health campaign emphasizing individual responsibility and a physically active way of life. Other elements of the campaigns can be availability and the social aspects of participation. For this group, the most attractive sporting activities may include walking/trekking, and possibly cycling or canoeing.

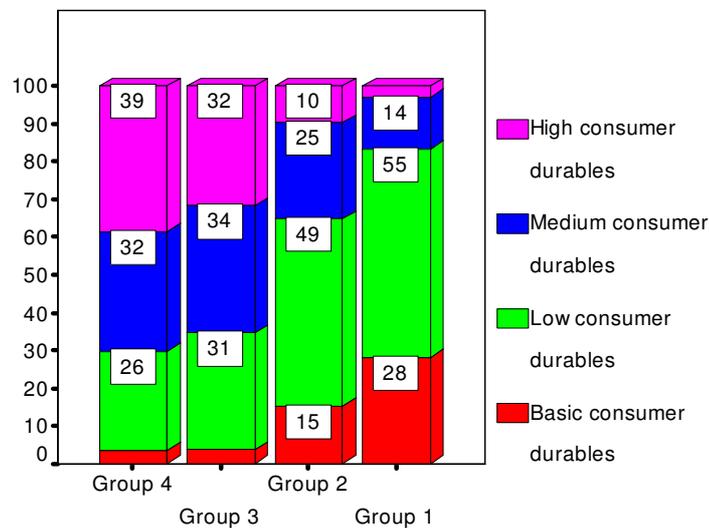


Figure 2. Consumer status distribution in the four groups (%)

In the case of Group 2, the results show that the share of the elderly and people with low consumption is high in this group as well (Figure 2). Since many from this group recognize the benefits of a physically active lifestyle, this 26% of the population can potentially be involved in active sport tourism, however mostly with affordable products. The sports mentioned in the first group are also relevant here, moreover, in this group more people recognize the importance of individual responsibility for one’s own health (Figure 3). This may make the members of the group more conscious sport tourists eventually.

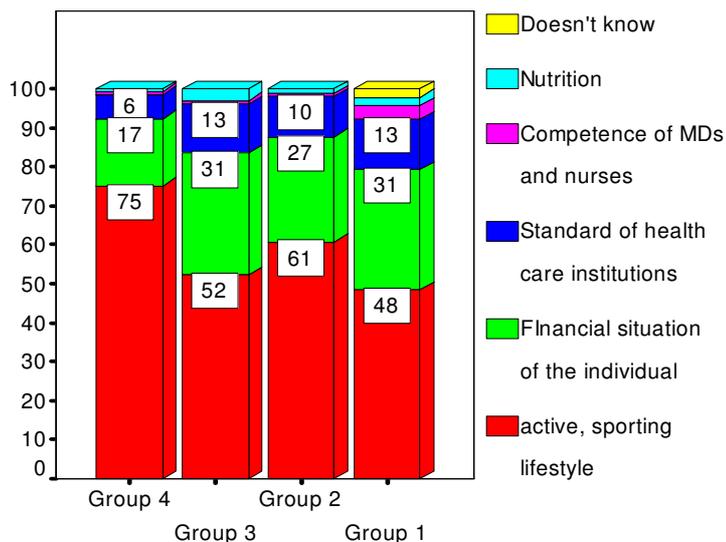


Figure 3. What is the most important factor in the preservation of health? (%)

As for the third group, it has to be emphasized that they are not primarily hindered by their financial opportunities in active participation in sport tourism. The lack of time and their negative attitudes to sport (81%) mean more serious problems (Figure 4). Accordingly, the most efficient sport products for the members of the group can be the least time-consuming ones. In addition to this, they should be targeted with messages about the recreational value of sport, since if the members of the group are not mobilized, then in older age they are likely to appear in the above-analyzed first group.

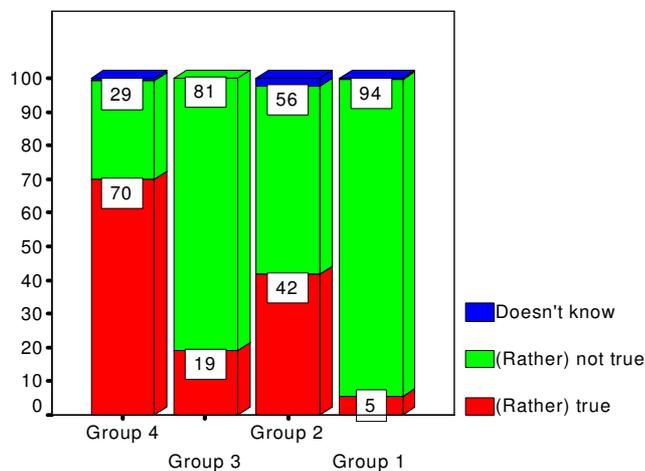


Figure 4. Do you enjoy doing sport? (%)

The members of Group 4 are in a more favourable position to join the sport tourist movement, with regard to both their age and social status. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that many of them have little free time, during which they try to engage in as many activities as possible. Among these activities, even if it is important, sport is only one of several. The consumer attitudes found in this group reflect that they are keen on choosing active ways of spending leisure time; however, in taking the decision it is certainly a crucial factor whether the activities are easily available, and how much recreational value they have for the consumer.

## Conclusion

The results of the research indicate that the social basis of active sport tourism is not very large. The most excluded group consists of citizens not doing sport, who never travel away from home for rest. Based on the sample, their share in the population can be estimated at one third. At the other end of the spectrum, we can find an approximate 4% who can be counted as active and conscious sport tourists.

After the in-depth analysis of the four groups categorized in the dimensions of sporting and travelling frequency, it can be claimed that the majority of Hungarian society is excluded from participation in active sport tourism, and, as a matter of fact also other forms of quality leisure activities, by their health condition and financial situation. For these people, only easily affordable and available tourist services can be a realistic alternative, and the information about them can primarily be transmitted through the electronic, but not the digital channels of the media. A further problem is that they tend to be unaware of the significance of lifestyle on health condition, which calls for further health campaigns besides the existing ones.

Nevertheless, many people are familiar with the influence of lifestyle on health and recognize the benefits of exercise in theory, yet in reality few people are involved in sporting activities, and for many, doing exercise is not a source of pleasure. That is why it is important that the messages referring to the positive impact of regular physical exercise reach the different social groups. In these messages, besides the often stressed health-preserving role, social and recreational aspects of sport as a leisure time activity should also be emphasised.

Clearly, the results leave several questions unanswered; however, they may serve as a starting point for further research. All in all, it can be concluded that the demands for services of sport tourism can be very different among the more affluent social groups and the less fortunate ones. Meeting the demands of the former may bring financial profit to the tourism industry, but adjusting the range of products to foster social inclusion is not to be expected from the market. In order to have social benefits, and not only economic ones, the state sector also needs to contribute to creating opportunities for the potential active sport tourists on the lower end of the social ladder.

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