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SPORTS ACTIVITIES BY SETTLEMENT AND REGION IN HUNGARY

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this work is to describe the changes the last decades have seen in the recreational sports activities of the urban and rural population. The study focuses on the time budget analysis of the 1963–1993 period, use of time studies as well as on the secondary analysis of the survey questionnaires and use of time studies of the Hungarian Central Statistics Office's (KSH) containing year 2000 in the statistical data collection on physical activity and sports.

Hungary is a "world power" in sports and a "nation of sports", at least when we look at our top athletes' achievements. If we consider the number of Olympic medals per capita, we come third on the world list (Földesiné, 1996). At the same time, we are not a sporty nation since 70% of the Hungarian population do not perform any sports activities whatsoever (Gáldi, 2002/b).

Our previous studies (Gáldi, 2002/a) proved that the greatest differences between sports activities are to be found in the case of the type of settlement out of all the examined variables. Therefore, on the eve of our accession to the European Union, this study highlights the conspicuous variations that occur in the participation in physical recreational activities of the Hungarian urban and rural population. In the EU member states these variations are significantly smaller or do not even exist (Palm, 1993).

In our paper we attempt to find connections between the population's sports activities and the level of urbanisation, concentrating mainly on the years following the change in the political system.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE KEY TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO RECREATION AND SPORTS

For the purpose of understanding the less well-known technical terms used in this paper, we need to clarify some key concepts. In the international usage of the term, **recreation** is the culture of spending **leisure** time, the creation of well-being, making one feel and be well. For **recreation**, of course, many means can be used, one of these is **sport**. It is worth defining the concept of **leisure time**, i.e. the free utilisation of time left after work or study and travelling time. The way leisure time is spent is characteristic of a person, therefore it carries value. The aim of **recreation** is to strengthen and regenerate human health, establish a balanced lifestyle and provide a constantly optimal mental and physical capacity. Certain activities and exercises can only be qualified according to their aims, therefore we cannot speak of clearly **leisure time sports** (Kovács, 1998/a.). Among the aims of **recreational activities** we can list relaxation, cultural entertainment or **fitness** but on the result side, the aim has to be a meaningfully spent quality life.

Fitness is an elevated level of one's health condition, i.e. the harmony of an optimal physical and mental operation and social adaptability; it is also a condition, a movement and a lifestyle. **Physical recreation** targets to achieve the above, and **being fit** in the concept of fitness is a condition as well as an aim. The areas of **physical recreation** are hobby-type activities, i.e. dancing or dance-like movements. In Anglo-Saxon countries **recreational sports** mean **physical activities** pursued with all kinds of recreational purposes, while here in our country physical exercise does not necessarily entail **sports activities**, i.e. the pursuit of some **class of sport**. The concept of **health sports** is used widely mainly in Western Europe, and it means regular **physical exercise** done with the purpose of improving and preserving the condition of health and preventing illness (Kovács, 1998/b).

CHANGES WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN HUNGARIAN SOCIETY THROUGHOUT THE DECADES

The socio-economic changes of the 1990s were coupled with quite unfavourable phenomena. There are great demographic problems, the transformation of the employment structure was followed by a decrease in real income, and social inequalities have escalated. Beside these, of course, we can experience positive changes too, like the rise in the education level of the population. In general, we may conclude that in many cases the improvement felt at macro-level – a primary result of the transposition of the economy – did not bring about significant

positive changes in various strata of society. Consequently, while the 80s were characterised by the slow erosion of the state socialist system with micro-social (family, local community) problems staying in the background as a result, in the 90s these latter problems came to the surface generating many bitter experiences (Laki, Lakatos, Újvári, 1990).

The change in composition of the population is a key element of a society's characteristic features. In this field, since the early 80s, increasingly worsening negative trends can be uncovered. Since the changes in number of inhabitants – in a practically stable social system – basically depend on the natural population increase, the low birth rate and the high death rate led to an adverse trend, i.e. a population reduction. In addition, the age composition of this decreasing population is not favourable either as the decline in fertility and bad mortality indexes resulted in an aging population. In theory, high mortality rates counterbalance the aging of a population, but since the mortality of the Hungarian middle-aged population is much higher than that of the elderly, this correlation can only work in practice to a much lesser extent. Furthermore, the change in life strategy observed in the 90s, i.e. the postponement of the time of marriage and having children due to the difficulties when starting a career and the higher number of students studying in higher education, further exacerbates low fertility indexes. The ageing of the population, i.e. the continuous growth of the retirement age population is a key factor in our study because here we are talking about a group that has special and relatively homogenous features of spending leisure time. Besides this, supporting and providing for an elderly population sets tasks that largely define how the active population currently use their time.

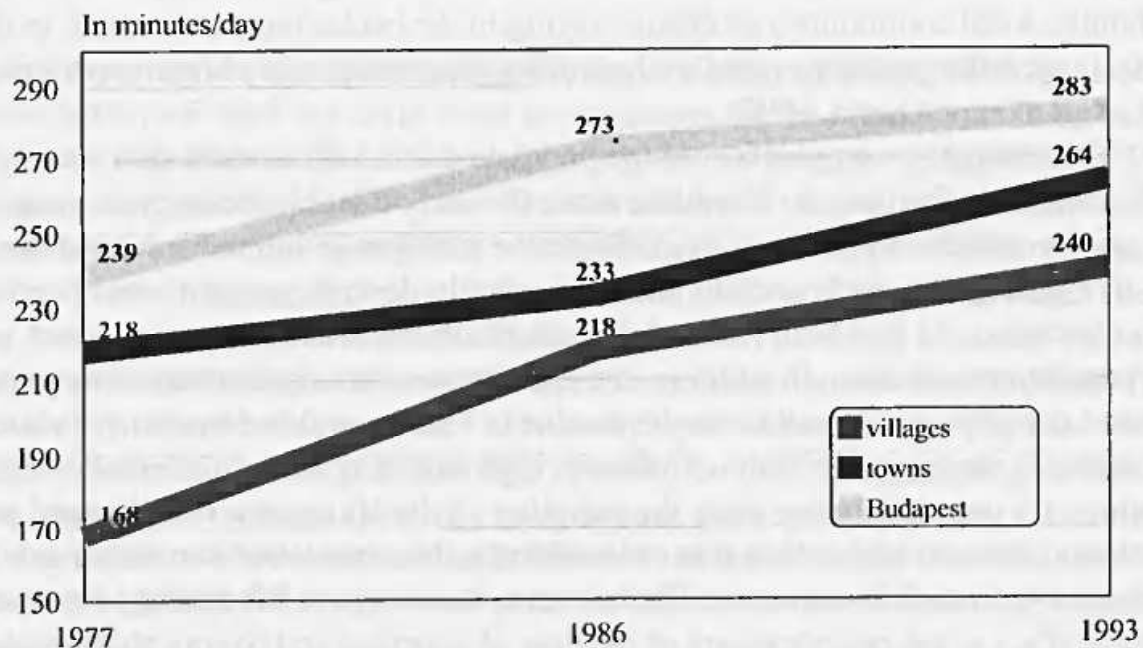
Together with the demographic crisis, experts also talk about an epidemiological crisis in Hungary (Gál, 2001) since our morbidity rates are among the worst in Europe. An unhealthy lifestyle and leisure time spent doing little exercise, all contribute to the above.

LEISURE TIME AND SPORTS BETWEEN 1977 AND 2000

When examining the differences between the amount of time used freely according to the types of domicile, we found that these differences – which were considerable in 1977 – were continuously dropping (Gáldi, 2002/a). However, the inner structure of leisure time has not changed: people in the capital still have most free time, while people in villages – who only reached the 1977 level of the amount of leisure time spent by those in the capital in 1993 – have the least (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Leisure time by population aged 18–69 between 1977–1993



The 1995 and 1996 research found that people in 1996 on average spent just a little more than three hours resting or enjoying entertainment, and this amount of time decreases by almost one hour within the course of one year. This decrease in leisure time naturally may apply differently to people of different social status. According to the research, village people experienced the greatest decrease, while those living in the capital were in a somewhat more favourable situation. Those under 30 years of age had to experience a nearly one and a half hour reduction in leisure time, an amount above the average (Gáldi, 2002/a).

Activities for Physical Recreation, According to Settlement

Within the active working population, active leisure time activities under the terms of "leisure exercise and working out" bear quite a different significance for the different social strata (according to type of settlement and sex). The average time (in minutes) spent on these activities per day for the time period of 1977 and 1993 is illustrated by the following table (Falussy, Zoltánka, 1994).

The amount of time spent on physical recreation – especially between 1977 and 1986 – increased as an absolute value, however, its significance decreased. For all the above time periods, in the case of both males and females, the data present how large an impact the type of settlement has. We can see that those living in the capital spend much more time on such activities than village people, both as far as the percentage proportion and the absolute values are concerned.

Table 1

The amount of time spent on physical recreation in different active working groups in Hungary (*average minutes per day*)^a

	Male			Female		
	1977	1986	1993	1977	1986	1993
Budapest	248 22 8.9%	261 17 6.5%	267 18 6.7%	195 17 8.7%	222 12 5.4%	203 12 5.9%
Other towns and cities	236 16 6.7%	237 13 5.5%	258 13 5.0%	165 10 6.1%	193 6 3.1%	192 6 3.1%
Villages	188 6 3.2%	218 7 3.2%	228 5 2.2%	140 4 2.9%	176 3 1.7%	184 3 1.6%

^a In each cell, the first figure presents the total leisure time of the actual social group, the second one shows the time used for physical recreation out of the total leisure time (both of which are given in minutes), while the third figure means the percentage of the time devoted to physical recreation. So for instance, those males living in the capital had 248 minutes of leisure time a day in 1977, 22 minutes, i.e. 8.9% of which they spent on active leisure time activities.

Examining the changes between 1986 and 1999, the data for the age group of 15–74 suggest a result where the amount of time spent on physical recreation (i.e. exercising or walking) only increase to a minimal extent. At the same time, for certain social groups this increase is more significant, while others experience a fallback. The following table presents the details of this phenomenon, according to type of settlement and sex (table 2).

Table 2

The time spent on recreation by the Hungarian population aged 15–74, according to sex and type of settlement (*average minutes per day*)

	Male		Female	
	1986	1999	1986	1999
Budapest	23	19	12	10
Cities	17	17	7	10
Other towns	15	15	6	8
Villages	6	11	3	5

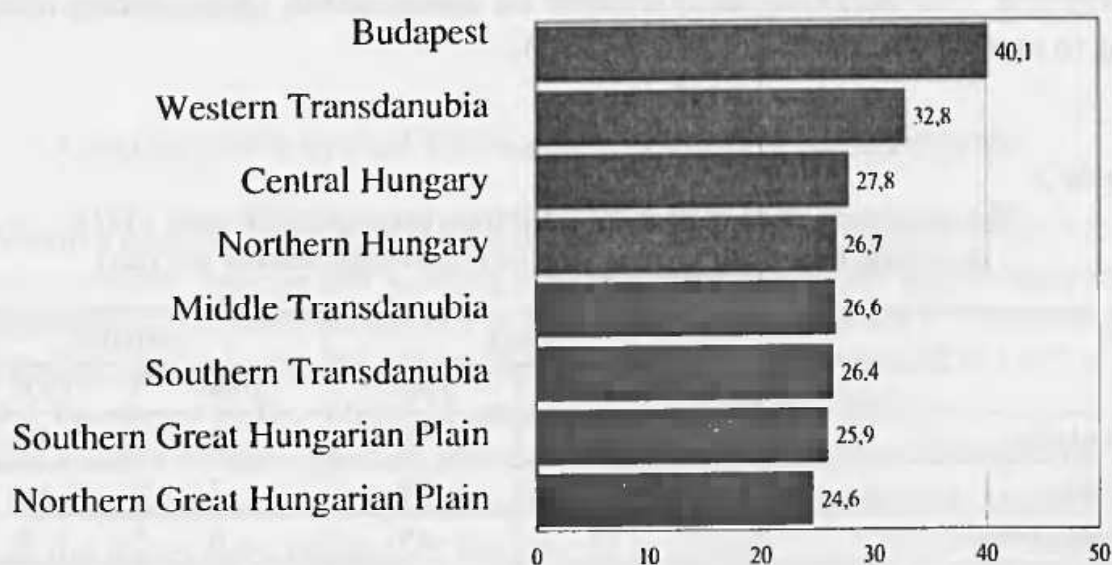
The data in table 2 clearly show that major changes occurred mainly in the type of settlement. The previous dominance of the capital seems to be diminishing and also mainly male village dwellers' active leisure time spending habits have changed favourably. Two factors play an important role: one of them is the expansion of the leisure time culture, vertically downwards on the scale of settlements; the other being the change in population, since those more qualified social groups who had more income and therefore placed larger emphasis on physical recreation started to leave the cities, especially the capital, and moved into surrounding settlements, therefore qualifying as "village residents".

Sports Activities in Various Regions and in Settlements of Different Levels of Urbanisation¹

In 2000, the greatest differences were caused by geographical location, size, type and other features of the location. Taking a close look at various regions, we will find that the frequency of doing sport is highest in the capital and the Western-Transdanubian region (here the actual Middle-Hungarian region – comprising Budapest and the county of Pest – was divided into two parts, this means that the data for Middle Hungary only applies to the county of Pest), while in the other regions respondents do sport in a more or less similar proportion (figure 2).

Figure 2

Sporting activities in different regions in Hungary (in %)



¹ The sample represents the country's 15–84 year-old population. Data recording took place in 4 periods according to seasons in 2000, in 353 settlements in Hungary.

Larger variations can be found if we examine the data by type of settlement. Here the difference that characterised previous decades is even more evident: i.e. in larger settlements where there are more sports facilities, the number of people participating in physical recreation is much higher.

Two other important factors have to be mentioned when referring to type of settlement as an explanatory variant. According to the information provided by data, with the decrease of the population of the settlements (from the capital to the community settlement) the proportion of men increases somewhat (from 45% to 49%). In other words, if the differences in sex were responsible, the situation would be exactly the other way round, i.e. those living in community settlements would do more sport (Gáldi, 2002/b).

The other factor is the level of education. This has a strong influence besides the factor of the type of settlement since among the residents of lower category settlements there is a bigger proportion of people with lower qualifications and a lower proportion of people with higher qualifications. The following table illustrates this point (table 3).

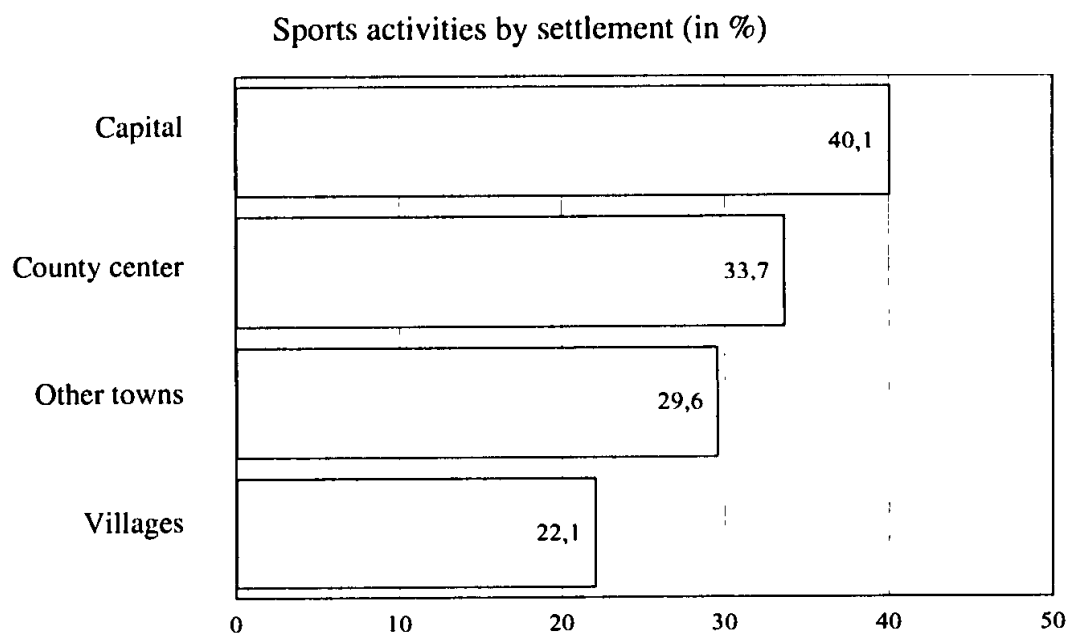
Table 3

Education level of respondents by different type of settlement (in %)

Type of settlement	Elementary school qualifications or lower	Vocational school	Vocational secondary school	High school, technical high school	College, university	Total
Capital	21	16	16	25	22	100
Municipal county seat	26	22	16	19	17	100
Other town	36	26	13	15	10	100
Community settlement	48	28	10	9	5	100

There is a significant difference between the capital and the villages, as for the group of those with the lowest qualifications and the group of those with the two highest qualifications. Among others, this is why there is a different importance attached to sports in everyday life. Let us examine this connection considering the frequency of sports activities of those living in the various types of settlements (figure 3).

Figure 3



When examining the differences between the sexes in various types of settlements, the afore-mentioned correlation becomes evident, i.e. the minimally higher number of men in the community settlements cannot counterbalance the features characteristic of the type of settlement. It is worth noting that the differences between the sexes alone are still considerable since the frequency of sports activities performed by women in the capital is roughly similar to that performed by men in smaller towns. This means that the previously described 10% difference between the sexes remains alongside the type of settlement, in fact, in the case of municipal county seats, this figure reaches 16% (figure 4).

The type of settlement is closely connected with the size of the settlement's population since it is mainly this latter feature that served the basis of public administrative classification. Therefore, we can expect that in a settlement with a larger population the proportion of those doing sport will be higher. This is indeed the case: less than one-fifth of those living in settlements with a population under a thousand, while nearly forty per cent of those living in cities with a population of over a hundred thousand said that they performed some kind of sports activity or exercise (figure 5).

Figure 4

Sports activities by gender and type of settlement (in %)

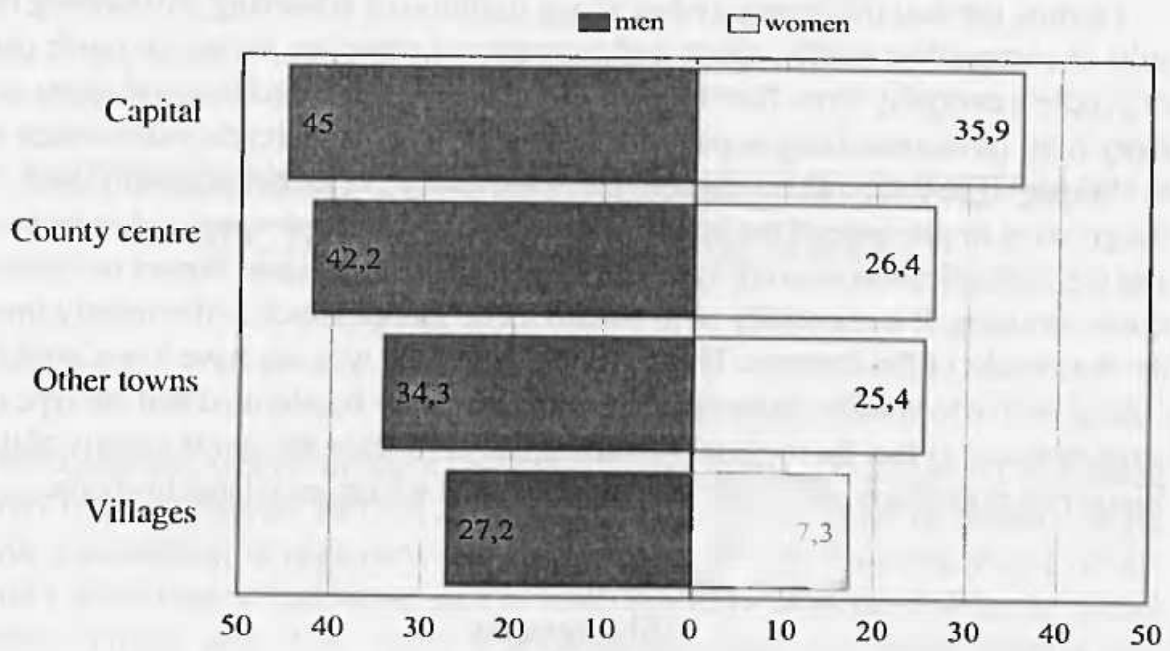
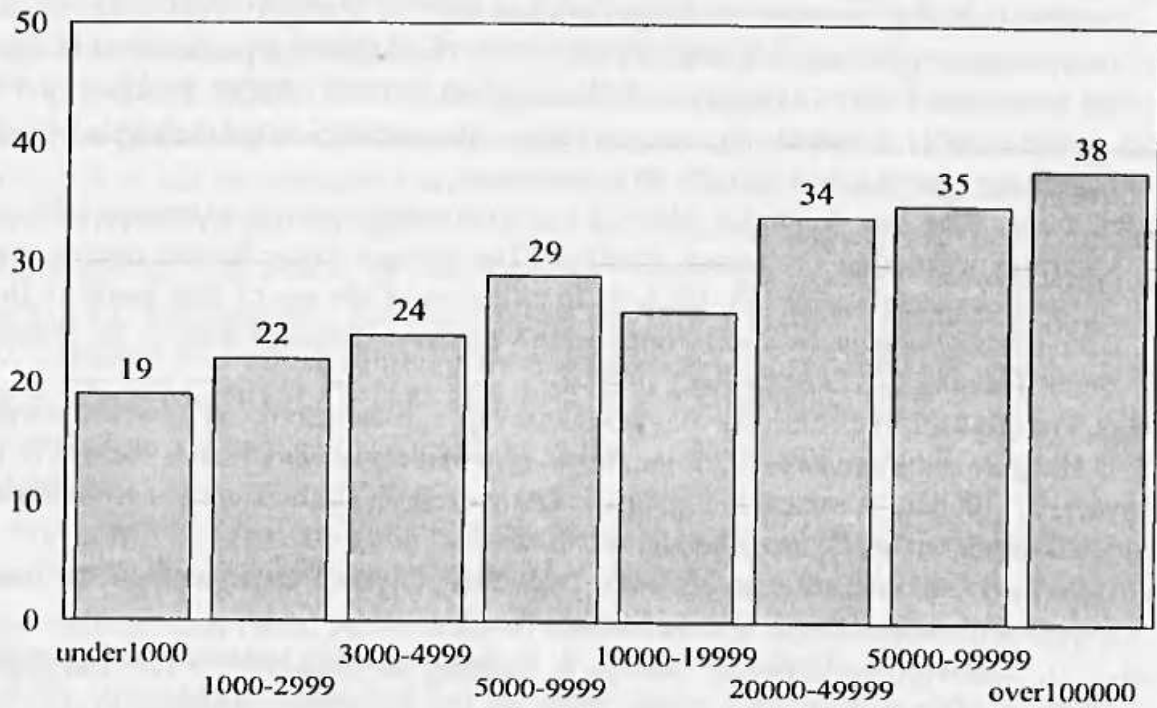


Figure 5

Sports activities by size of settlement (in %)



SUMMARY

Despite the fact that Hungary has a long tradition of achieving outstanding results in competitive sports, sports and recreational activities are not so much part of people's everyday lives. Several factors prevent regular exercising and sports activity from forming an integral part of a healthy lifestyle in all developed societies as in Hungary. The concomitant phenomena of switching to a market economy, such as the growing importance of the job, the elevated need for supplementing lost income and the intensification of work-type activities all have a negative impact on recreational activities. It is especially so in certain social groups which suffer mainly from the drawbacks of the changes. These groups, especially women, have lower qualifications or live in smaller settlements. In our analysis we highlighted that the type of settlement and in fact the regional location greatly influence the sports activity of the Hungarian population and those aspects of lifestyle which are related to sports.

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