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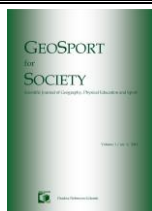
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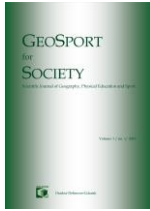


Contents

Volume 21, no. 2/ 2024, pp. 72-157

- Thandazani CHINHANGA, Martin MTHEMBU, Siyabulela NYIKANA • *University sport events and environmental management in the global south: Prospects and challenges for sustainability*..... 72
- Adrian Miroslav MERKA, Viorel COJOCARU • *The financing of sports in some European Union countries*..... 88
- Christian M. ROGERSON, Mitchell C.N. MALOVHA, Jayne M. ROGERSON • *New urban tourism in the Global South: The case of inner-city Johannesburg*..... 97
- Andrada Maria BULZ, Mihai ȘANDRA, Anca Maria SABĂU, Emilia Florina GROSU, Gheorghe Codruț BULZ • *Enhancing motor skills and coordination in middle schoolers through innovative physical education programs*..... 115
- Dragoș Vasile SĂVESCU, Pavel Ionuț PETRICA, Bianca Cristina SĂVESCU • *The development of determining motor qualities in children aged 10-12*..... 126
- Tekla Fruzsina TÓTH, Puskás Andrea LENTÉNÉ • *The impact of dance on fitness: Physical and educational benefits for high school students*..... 136

Andreia TĂRCĂIET, Raluca BUHAŞ • Enhancing work-life balance through physical and recreational activities.....	146
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University sport events and environmental management in the global south: Prospects and challenges for sustainability

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Abstract: There has been growing interest in the relationship between sporting events and the environment they are hosted in. Such discussions have sought to unpack the implications of sporting events on the environment as part of broader sustainable development concerns globally. However, many such studies have focused on large-scale sporting events, neglecting small-scale events, and especially annual events at universities. This is in spite of the popularity, and the large numbers associated with university sports. This study critically analyses the relationship between university sporting events and environmental management. The growing debates around sustainability in events management and tourism have gained significant focus in recent years, particularly in the Global North. Such contestations have largely been neglected in the Global South contexts, especially in smaller-scale events and university sporting events. A quantitative research design was adopted in collecting data from questionnaire surveys from event attendees at university sports events, using a spatially based systematic sampling technique. Findings revealed a lack of pro-environmental behaviour amongst the attendees, resulting in negative environmental impacts at the events. Furthermore, how these events were hosted suggests minimal implementation of proper environmental management, especially insofar as waste disposal, awareness raising about pollution, and encouraging pro-environmental behaviour. The study concludes that event managers at university sporting events ought to make environmental management

central to their events planning and management, and thus make deliberate efforts to enhance environmental education and pro-environmental behaviour amongst attendees.

Keywords: environmental behaviour, environmental management, small-scale events, sport tourism, sustainable development

Introduction

In recent years, particularly in the past two decades, society has witnessed the exponential growth of the sports tourism sector, proving its major potential and benefits for the host destinations (Gibson et al., 2012; Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2024). Ma et al. (2023) explain that sport has proved its contribution to the tourism sector with several economic, cultural, political, and social benefits, amongst others. The scale of sporting events varies from international mega-events to small and local competitions (Mchunu et al., 2022). Fernández-Martinez et al. (2022) contend that sports tourism contributes significantly to a destination's social and economic development. Nyikana and Tichaawa (2020) explain that there is an interrelationship between sports and tourism, resulting in the formation and notable growth of sports tourism. The dynamic subsector of sports tourism has become an important economic activity in both developed and developing world contexts as they seek to advance to event-driven economies (Swart and Bob, 2007). Over the years, the sector has garnered attention from governments and policymakers for its ability to contribute to tourism's role in urban regeneration, job creation, infrastructural development and tourism promotion (Nyikana et al., 2014).

Several countries have noticed the significant growth of sports tourism over the years and have identified the potential benefits this industry can have on developing their economies, especially in developing countries (Bob and Swart, 2010; Bama and Tichaawa, 2020). According to Csoban and Serra (2014), the scale of sports tourism ranges from mega-events that attract millions of people to small-scale local events where the athletes may outnumber the spectators. Hall (2012) explains that mega-events take place once in a lifetime in the host country, while small-scale events are held regularly and are more influential in the community's life. Sports tourism as a phenomenon has gained traction over the past decades (Gibson et al., 2012), however, much of the research on sport tourism has been of the developed context where it is working and effectively leveraged. In recent times, the Global South has sought to focus on this sector because it presents many benefits, for example, infrastructure development and helping them to achieve their long-term goals in a short period of time (Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2024). However, the working definitions and experiences in the Global North are not necessarily compatible with the Global South, therefore the research on the specifics of what sport tourism is in the context of the Global South and Africa in particular becomes increasingly important.

In extant literature, much of the academic focus on sporting events has been biased towards the popular and highly impactful mega-events, while their small-scale counterparts are largely neglected in the analysis (Bazzanella et al., 2019). Such neglect has opened the research opportunity to compare the implications of small-scale events versus mega-events, with many studies suggesting that small-scale

events are the more sustainable event type (Gibson et al., 2012). The growing interest in small-scale events has been perpetuated by the observed number of benefits that small-scale sporting events bring to local communities and the economy (Gibson et al., 2012; Mchunu et al., 2022). Csoban and Serra (2014) assert that small-scale sports events have tourism potential and can have more benefits for the local economy than mega-events by providing additional income and raising local community pride.

Despite the recent interest in small-scale sporting events, much of the academic literature and analysis has been biased towards the Global North, especially on the economic and socio-cultural aspects of these events (Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2020). There is a dearth of research on the environmental implications of the events (Mchunu et al., 2021), thereby revealing a knowledge gap for this study. Sports tourism and the environment are directly interlinked, with numerous events fully dependent on the environment. According to Gibson et al. (2012), small-scale sporting events occur more regularly than their large-scale counterparts and as such, their relationship with the environment needs to be understood. In an earlier analysis by Higham (1999), it was revealed that small-scale sporting events may be an important sustainable form of tourism development for communities. This was later confirmed and strongly supported by scholars such as Gibson et al (2012) and Mchunu et al. (2021). Toscani et al. (2021) opine that environmentally responsible practices are becoming common in event planning and tourism. Event organizers are rethinking their operations and orienting them towards sustainability systems. Daddi et al. (2022) observe that in recent years there have been efforts made by sporting event organisers to fulfil environmental sustainability objectives. However, they caution that these efforts are not led by governance and are exclusively dictated by economic benefits. While there has been some progress made in analysing small-scale events and the environment, little attention has been paid to university sports as a form of small-scale recurring events. This study analyses environmental management within university sports events, unpacking the challenges and opportunities for sustainability accordingly. In terms of structural arrangement, the next section presents a literature review, followed by a description and justification for the research methodology and design adopted for this paper. Later, the discussion of the findings is presented, followed by the conclusion and suggested recommendations.

Literature review

Small-scale sports events in context

Small-scale sports events have gained popularity due to their perceived minimal negative impacts on the local economy and environment (Tzetzis et al., 2013; Mchunu et al., 2021). According to Malchrowicz-Moško and Poczta (2018), small-scale sports events are events that take place during the regular season and/or off-season and on most occasions do not require exorbitant resources as most of the required resources are available in the host destination. Camacho et al. (2021) mention that these events positively impact the host destination, through sporting participation and the enhancement of the destination's image, social development, human capital, and economic development. Abdykadyrova (2022) adds that small-scale sports events have helped in the shaping of athletes', parents', and organizers'

meaning of place at a destination. They further provide the opportunity to preserve and conserve the environment, presenting an ideal platform for the communication and implementation of environmental management programmes (Mchunu et al., 2021). In addition, they aid in creating a platform for the natural environment to be showcased (Tichaawa et al., 2015). In as much as there is limited literature on the environmental impacts of small-scale sports events, Hritz and Cecil (2019) opine that small-scale sports events have been perceived to have positive environmental impacts on the local destination. Despite such positive associations, there have been suggestions that they are not entirely environmentally friendly either as they cause negative impacts such as noise pollution, littering, and degradation of public facilities like roads and bridges (Hritz and Cecil, 2019). Consequently, a debate arises as to the true environmental consequences of these events and their role in sustainable development.

The link between small-scale sporting events and sustainability

Small-scale sporting events occur more frequently than mega-events do, meaning that they are closely linked to the environment and its management (Gibson et al., 2012). Despite this link, academic literature has arguably neglected the analysis of the environmental impacts and strategies implemented at small-scale events (Getz, 2008; Han et al., 2015). Han et al. (2015) further explain that the study of small-scale sporting events is imperative as these events have an environmental responsibility in that they attract unexpected numbers into a confined space over a relatively short period. Gibson et al. (2012) argue that because of their size, small-scale sporting events can be used as a method for sustainable tourism development. This is because these events use existing infrastructure, require less public funding, and cause minimal disruptions to local communities at the destination (Higham, 1999). Mchunu et al. (2021) opine that such events can also be an effective means through which the challenge of seasonality can be overcome. In this regard, they argue that regularly hosting small-scale events in the periods when tourists are not coming to the destination can extend the traditional tourist season and help offset the losses that otherwise would be experienced by the tourism value chain.

Gibson et al. (2012) stress that the importance of small-scale events also lies in the fact that they tend to be compatible and consistent with the host community's infrastructure as well as human cultural capital, which makes them a viable form of sustainable tourism. They further contend that small-scale sporting events may lower the carbon footprint as the majority of the participants and attendees tend to be drawn from local and regional visitors. This is the case for university sports, as they tend to have a regional reach, thus attracting tourists with lower carbon footprints. Casper et al. (2020) postulate that the public nature of university sports events is important to promote environmental sustainability and encourage pro-environmental behaviour.

Environmental behaviours of small-scale sporting attendees

There has been an increase in analysis of the environmental and pro-environmental behaviour of event attendees (Paço and Lavrador, 2017; Achu, 2019;

Mchunu et al., 2021). Paço and Lavrador (2017) describe environmental behaviour as the adoption of attitudes and behaviours that aim to minimise any effects on the natural environment, whilst Mchunu (2021) defines it as the way that people behave in an environmental setting, either showcasing positive or negative behavioural traits. According to McCullough et al. (2019), there is a pressing need to consider the reverse relationship of how human behaviours affect the environment. Casper et al. (2017) suggest that to understand the effectiveness of any environmental initiative, there is a need for an assessment of fans' (attendees') environmental behaviours. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature on the environmental behaviour of sports attendees (Mchunu, 2021). Han et al. (2015) concur that little research has been conducted on the environmental behaviour of sports event attendees globally as well as the environmental behaviour patterns of sports event attendees while at home and sporting events. Mchunu (2021) explains that the environmental behaviour of sports attendees is associated with several factors, such as attendees' environmental perceptions, socio-demographic profiles, and environmental awareness levels. Han et al. (2015) suggest that an attendee's environmental behaviour can differ between home and the sporting event due to numerous characteristics such as the event attendee's perceived destination, environmental responsibility, event attendee types, and experience-use history. In unpacking the environmental management within a university sporting event, this study takes into consideration all these factors and the unique context of where the study was conducted.

Methodology

This study was conducted amongst sports event attendees in universities in Johannesburg, South Africa. Johannesburg has in recent years branded itself as a cosmopolitan city with a varied tourism offering but has close ties with sports (Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa, 2019; Mchunu, 2021). According to Nthangeni et al. (2021), universities provide a platform for different sporting competitions to take place, facilitating travel around the country for sporting codes such as soccer, hockey, rugby, cricket, and athletics among others. This study was grounded on the positivist research paradigm where a quantitative research approach was used for the collection and analysis of the data. Apuke (2017) states that quantitative research is a research method in which data is analysed by quantifying the given data to obtain results. It involves collecting and analysing numerical data to answer who, why, what, where, how, how much, and how many. The quantitative methods in collecting data include survey research, experimental research, correlation research, and causal-comparison research (Apuke, 2017). In this regard, a questionnaire survey (n=203) was used in which university sporting (University of Johannesburg) attendees were surveyed using a spatially based systematic sampling approach. Using previous attendance and stadium capacity, the first respondent was selected randomly, and thereafter an interval of every 5th respondent was chosen for inclusion in the study until the data collection was complete. The target population of the study were event attendees at university sporting events. The instrument used consisted of three main sections of focus. The first section of the survey sought to gain a background about the attendees, in relation to their group composition, their modes of transport used

to attend the event, as well as the frequency and regularity of attending such small-scale university sporting events. The second section of the survey sought to gauge environmental awareness and concern for the environment amongst the attendees. This section also measured the perceptions of pro-environmental practices at the event. The final section of the survey analysed the perceptions of environmental management as well as attendee attitudes towards the environmental impacts of university sporting events. The data was captured and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results are presented in the sections that follow.

Results

Previous attendance at university games

Getz and Andersson (2010) suggest that by their very nature, small-scale events lend themselves to more repeat attendance when compared to larger-scale events, linked to the fact that they occur frequently, and in most cases annually. According to Nyikana et al. (2014), previous attendance at an event is a very important determinant for repeat visitation, especially when the attendee was satisfied with their experience the previous time. In this respect, the respondents were asked how many times they had previously attended a university sports event as shown in Table 1 below. The findings reveal that while 13.8% of the respondents were first-time visitors, the overwhelming majority (86.2%) had been to a university sporting event either once or multiple times. From an environmental management awareness perspective, this would qualify many of them to have observed the current state of practices at these events and enable them to provide the information needed for this study. This is especially so when considering that Mchunu et al. (2021) posit that generally, small-scale sporting event attendees tend to be more environmentally conscious and are prone to act in more environmentally responsible ways than attendees at mega-events.

Table 1. Number of times respondents attended university sports events in the past (n=203, n%)

Number of university sports events attended	Total (n=203)
Never (This is my first time)	13.8
Once before	15.3
2-4 times	26.1
5-8 times	15.8
9-12	10.8
13>	18.2

Mode of transportation used by respondents

The respondents were further asked what mode of transportation they had used to travel to the event on the day of data collection. This question is relevant because generally, tourism and sport as industries have been largely criticized for being some of the major contributors to climate change and pollution (Gibson, 2013; Mchunu, 2021). Mchunu (2021) reports that this criticism is a direct result of the mode of transport used by sports tourists, especially flights and cars, which worsens

carbon emissions. In this study, it was found that the majority of those surveyed (53.7%) had used school buses to get to the event venue (Table 2). This was not surprising as many universities tend to have free inter-campus bus and shuttle services for students to move around the different campuses. There were also a notable number of attendees (22.2%) who had walked to the event venue. The remaining sample was divided into those who used private cars (16.3%) and those who used public transport (7.4%). From this data, it can be deduced that the attendees sampled had, for the most part, made use of sustainable means of transportation as travelling in groups (bus/public transport) and walking are seen as such. Mchunu et al. (2021) have previously made the argument that public transportation, walking and cycling are some of the transport modes which contribute positively to environmental sustainability and the reduction of carbon emissions. Moreover, Dolf (2017) found that one of the ways or opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint at university sporting events was to increase the vehicle occupancy rate, which means increasing the number of seats in the transportation used for attendees. According to Cayolla et al. (2023), the modes of transportation that attendees use are a direct contributor to carbon emissions, and analysing this factor can help make sporting events more sustainable.

Table 2. Mode of transport used by respondents (n=203, n%)

Mode of transport	Total (n=203)
Private Car	16.3
Walked	22.2
School Bus	54.1
Public Transport	7.4

Respondents’ group composition

Respondents were then requested to indicate their group composition in relation to the number of people travelling in their group. There were four categories from which they could choose to respond to this question. The majority of respondents (63.5%) attended a university sporting event with a group of friends, whilst other respondents indicated that they attended with family (2%) or a mixture of family and friends (4.9%) (Table 3). The findings suggest that most attendees travel in large groups rather than alone, which can be viewed as environmentally friendly behaviour as this practice reduces the contribution of carbon emissions emitted from transportation (Oliver, 2016). Finally, 21.7% of the respondents indicated travelling in a university group which may indicate using the university bus system.

Table 3. Respondent group composition (n=203, n%)

Description of the group composition	Total (n=203)
Friends	63.5
Family	2
Family and Friends	4.9
Tour Group	0.5
University Group	21.7
Not Applicable	7.4

Environmental behaviour and experiences at university sport games

Respondents' level of environmental concern

To understand attendees' level of environmental concern, attendees were asked to indicate from a level of 1 to 5 what their level of concern for the environment is, with 1 being "extremely concerned" and 5 being "not concerned at all". The findings revealed that the majority of respondents (67%) were extremely concerned, while a notable number (34%) were not concerned at all. These were the two extremes in the findings, while the others ranged somewhere between. Although the vast majority of respondents were concerned, it was alarming that 34% indicated having no concern at all for the environment. This could potentially translate into careless behaviour where environmental management is concerned and is particularly true when considering arguments by some scholars that the level of interest or concern that event attendees have about the environment dictates their pro-environmental behaviour while at events (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2007; Yuan, 2013; Kruger, 2015). Some studies suggest that sporting event organisers blame attendees, saying that in general, they have a bad attitude toward environmental sustainability and therefore show a lack of environmental concern (Yuan, 2013; Kruger, 2015; Vicente-Molina et al., 2018).

Pro-environmental measures implemented at university games

According to Han et al. (2015), visitors' environmental behaviour can be influenced by the environmental measures that sports event organizers implement. Mchunu et al. (2021) stress that the failure of event organisers to create efficient waste management measures may encourage participants to litter. Against this background, the attendees were asked about their perceptions of the environmental measures that had been implemented for the university games at the stadium. It is crucial to remember that for spectators to act sustainably during sporting events, the event organizers must take environmental precautions. Respondents were asked to answer yes or no if they had seen any of the environmental behaviours listed in Table 4 below. As revealed in the table, many pro-environmental measures were part of the events and many were noticed by attendees. However, some items were flagged as being of concern. For example, attendees had not seen the messages encouraging the use of public transport, nor about restricting plastic, polystyrene and glass at the event. It was interesting to note that many (45.8%) of the attendees had not seen employees who walked around and picked up litter during the event. This could be because in many cases, the litter is picked up when everyone has left and the event has ended. It could be argued though that having people picking up the litter during the event could encourage and prompt attendees to be conscious about disposing of their litter in the correct rubbish bins.

Table 4. Environmental behaviour and experiences at university sports events

Environmental measures implemented	Yes	No
Rubbish bins	97%	3%
Recycle bins (paper, glass, plastic, food waste)	81.8%	18.2%
Reusable products (water bottles, plates, cups, garbage plastics)	72.9%	27.1%

Signage posts for rubbish bins	71.4%	28.6%
Signage posts for recycling bins	72.9%	27.1%
Signage posts that state "Do not litter/keep the area clean"	73.9%	26.1%
Signage posts that encourage the use of public transport	40.9%	59.1%
Signage posts that restrict attendees from bringing items such as plastic, polystyrene, and glass into the event	54.2%	45.8%
Event employees who pick up litter during the event	60.1%	39.9%
Other	48.3%	51.7%

The final section of the survey sought to determine respondents' perceptions of the impact of university sporting events on environmental sustainability. Respondents were asked to respond to statements using a Likert-type scale to rate whether they Strongly disagreed (SD), Disagreed (D), were Neutral (N), Agreed (A) or Strongly agreed (SA) with the given statement. For analysis, the SA and A scales were combined to make an agreement scale. The SD and D scales were also combined to make the disagreement scale. The results of this section are presented in Table 5 below.

Respondents were instructed to indicate the level at which they agreed or disagreed with the survey statement that university sports events maintain and preserve flora and fauna. The majority of respondents were neutral (42.9%) regarding the statement. This might be because respondents were unsure of this statement—flora and fauna in the context of a sporting event might not be significant as sporting events are held in a controlled environment (often stadiums with minimal natural plant and animal life). However, comparing the percentage of respondents who agreed (16.8%) and disagreed (40.4%), there was an overwhelming number who disagreed with the statement. The findings do not align with studies such as Perić et al. (2018) who report that in sports tourism, including small-scale sporting events (especially outdoor sporting events), there is a strong relationship between tourism development and the natural environment. This relationship shows that efforts to preserve flora and fauna are a priority.

Regarding university sports events promoting recycling, 37.4% of respondents disagreed, 36.5% agreed, and 26.1% remained neutral on this statement. Past studies have found that recycling waste was one of the most environmentally sustainable ways to manage a small-scale sporting event (Mchunu et al., 2021). Ma and Takeuchi (2020) believe that for a sporting event to be eco-friendly, practices such as recycling have to be implemented. The findings in Table 5 further indicate the different characteristics of attendees. This idea is supported by Han et al. (2015) who opine that the behaviours and perceptions of attendees at university sports events are for the most part dictated by the attendees' characteristics. Han et al. (2015) elaborate that attendees' recycling behaviour scores decrease significantly from their home recycling habits to those displayed at university sporting events.

The next statement sought to gauge if sporting events aided in raising awareness about environmentally responsible behaviour. Once more, there were mixed feelings regarding this item as many attendees (34.5%) agreed, while 36.9% disagreed. According to Mair and Laing (2013), attendees' pro-environmental behaviour is enhanced or apparent at small-scale events which are sustainability-

focused. Ramchandani and Coleman (2012) found that sporting events had the potential to inspire attendees to be more pro-environmentally responsible.

Respondents were next required to share their views on whether university sports events have transitioned from physical paper tickets to electronic tickets. 38.9% of respondents disagreed with the statement, 30.0% were neutral and 31% agreed. This divided spread of results may be because the events used both paper-based tickets and digital tickets (downloaded from the Web). Findings from Popp et al. (2021) show that 29.6% of the respondents surveyed in their study preferred traditional paper tickets whilst 48.3% preferred e-tickets. With respondents having the prerogative to choose which form of ticket they wanted to use, the findings in this study were unsurprising.

Respondents were then asked if they agreed with the statement that university sports events make provision for sustainable organising and breakdown of events. 29.6% of respondents disagreed with the statement, 32.5% agreed, while the rest of the respondents (37.9%) were neutral about the statement. Mombeuil (2020) mentions that for small-scale sporting events, sports event managers need to consider the venue to host the event, third-party service providers and a contingency plan, referring to the efforts rallied in organizing and planning a small-scale event.

The final statement required respondents to rate their level of agreement with the statement that university sports events have a waste management programme in place. 31.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement, 35.9% agreed and 32.5% took a neutral stance regarding the statement. This once again shows the mixed nature of the findings regarding environmental sustainability where university sports events are concerned.

Table 5. Attendees' perception of university sports events' impact on environmental sustainability (n=203, n%)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
University sports events maintain and preserve flora and fauna.	11.82	28.57	42.86	11.33	5.42
University sports events promote recycling waste.	8.87	28.57	26.10	23.15	13.30
University sports events make attendees aware of environmentally responsible behaviour.	9.85	27.09	28.57	24.63	9.85
University sports events have transitioned from physical paper tickets to electronic tickets.	16.27	22.66	30.05	20.69	10.34
University sports events make provisions for sustainable organizing and breakdown of events.	12.31	17.24	37.93	23.64	8.87
University sports events have a waste management programme in place.	7.89	23.64	32.51	24.14	11.82

The findings collectively indicate a major gap in terms of environmental management and sustainability in the context of university sports games. While there are measures in place, much room exists for improvement where this is concerned.

Discussion

According to Mchunu et al. (2021), the environmental impacts of small-scale sports events include waste generation, carbon emissions, and resource depletion. This is why it is important to consider these aspects when assessing the sustainability impacts of small-scale sporting events. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the impact of university sporting events on the environment. The findings of the study concur that certain environmental practices assist in reducing the environmental impact that university sports events have. Case in point, promoting sustainable transportation, such as cycling, walking, and public transport can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of small-scale sports events. Moreover, the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, could significantly reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions (Mchunu et al., 2021). The attendees of university sporting events have the perception that these events prioritize environmental sustainability, and in turn, the more sustainable the event is, the more pro-environmental their behaviour will be, a view previously highlighted by some researchers (see for example Ramichandani and Coleman, 2012; Mair and Laing, 2013; Han et al., 2015; Mombeuil, 2020; Popp et al., 2021). The findings further show that the majority of attendees view university sporting events as implementing environmental measures although the effectiveness of these is questionable, given the notable number of attendees who were unsure and remained neutral on this topic.

There were several issues identified in this study's findings that need to be addressed by event organisers at university sports events. Firstly, there were many repeat visitors, which opened up the opportunity to develop pro-environmental attitudes and reinforce these year in and year out. However, it seemed that this was not the case, as there were a lot of nuanced observations regarding some of the measures implemented at the events, as well as negative perceptions of some of the environmental management and sustainability measures seen. Secondly, the levels of concern about the environment seemed to suggest that much still needed to be done regarding educating and raising awareness of the need to preserve the environment. While many were extremely concerned about the environment, the numbers not concerned at all were alarming. Given that the environmental behaviour at the event may extend to home and other areas beyond the event, the need to educate and reinforce the need to take care of the environment cannot be understated.

It is clear that sports events have a great potential to contribute to environmental sustainability but this platform is not taken advantage of by event organisers and other authorities.

Conclusion

This study focussed on university sporting events, which have been largely neglected in sports tourism literature, especially in the Global South. This is despite these events occurring annually in the physical or built environment. The findings

revealed that many attendees to university sporting events were repeat visitors. As such, they are in a position to analyse existing environmental management measures adopted at the events. Equally, their loyalty to these events presents an opportune platform to enhance their environmental consciousness and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour during events, and ultimately, in their homes and work places and beyond. It was also important to observe that many of these attendees made use of sustainable modes of transportation such as buses, shuttles and walking when going to the event. Such practices bode well for pro-environmental behaviour, reduced carbon emissions and sustainability generally linked to sporting events. Expectedly, many attendees were travelling in groups comprised of friends and family or tour groups. This finding also highlighted the important role of sporting events generally, but university sports as an important platform for social interaction. Besides, it has been argued that sporting events can offer a unique opportunity to spend time with family and friends.

While a majority of the attendees indicated having general concerns about the environment, it was alarming that a notable number of them (34%) suggested that they were not at all concerned for the environment. When analysed in line with the ever-increasing debates about the need to preserve the environment and move towards sustainable means of development, this finding was of great concern. Primarily, it implies that the lack of concern for the environment may also lead to negligent and/or careless behavior where environmental management is concerned. This highlights the need to double the efforts to communicate, educate, and raise awareness about pro-environmental behaviour amongst university sports event attendees. Doing so should reinforce the need to constantly behave in a pro-environmental manner whilst at the event and beyond. Despite this glaring need to raise awareness, and the ideal platform events provide to communicate environmental management messages, the event organisers of university sports are still failing to optimally maximise on this opportunity. In this study, it was found that many attendees had not seen any messages encouraging them to use public transport, nor about restricting plastic and polystyrene and glass at events. They also did not observe any staff or volunteers picking up litter on the ground, which was an opportunity missed to influence the responsible disposal of litter. The study concludes therefore that, while there were a lot of positive observations regarding environmental management in university sporting events, there were numerous missed opportunities. In order to make greater contributions to sustainable management of events in the global south, event managers need to increase the efforts to educate and raise awareness amongst event attendees, which in turn should lead to more pro-environmental behaviour by the attendees even beyond the event space. At a time when there is growing debate about sustainability, such platforms should be capitalised on and used optimally to ensure the communication of the relevant messages to people.

Therefore, this study makes a modest contribution to the literature on sport tourism and the environment, especially from a global south context. Lessons learned from this study can feed into future plans of environmental management linked to small-scale sporting events in the university setting and beyond. Some of the findings

could inform strategies and policies of sports events hosted within the university context.

Limitations and future works

Finally, despite all the above, certain limitations were apparent in the study. Firstly, obtaining access to different universities was difficult, hence not all universities in Johannesburg were included in the study. A further limitation was the quantitative nature of the data collection, which excluded key insights and justifications for the environmental practices and behaviours depicted above. It is recommended that future research should include a greater number of universities and stakeholders within the university sports tourism network. Similarly, a mixed-method research design could be used, in order to gain in-depth insights and justification for some of the behaviour and impacts expressed in this quantitative study.

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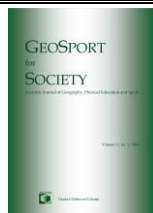
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The financing of sports in some European Union countries

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Abstract: In Romania, the financing of sports, particularly sports clubs, is predominantly sourced from public funds (whether from the state, county, or local budgets), depending on the regulations in force. This research focuses on the study of European and national sports policies and the various forms of financing for sports clubs. Sport is a fundamental human right, recognized by major international organizations and addressed by European sports policy, which has been gradually implemented over decades. Every society needs to prepare to acknowledge sport as a right for every individual. Generally, in most European countries, societal preparation for sports practice is more intensive and varied compared to Romania. In Romania, reforms in the sports sector lag significantly behind those in other countries and fall short of Romanian expectations regarding sports. Additionally, financial resources are often insufficient. The legislation needs to be revised, addressing both the methods of financing and the sources of these funds. Increased involvement from both the private sector and the government is necessary; otherwise, the quality of sports will deteriorate, and those excelling in sports may choose to compete in other countries or clubs where conditions and financial support are more favorable. Compared to the situation in Romania, the synthesis of sports club financing across different European countries reveals a significant disparity. Most European countries have recognized that sport is a key driver of economic development and have long-established programs to support and develop community sports initiatives.

Keywords: financing, legislation, fund, sport club

Introduction

Regarding the educational gap in sports in Romania, it is essential to acknowledge that the policies of clubs, sports associations, and even competent ministries often rely on external pressures rather than on an understanding of market demand or the existence of a coherent strategy for sports development through appropriate investments (Stan, 2007).

From an economic perspective, sport significantly impacts other key areas of society, such as social inclusion and promoting a healthy lifestyle. In Romania, the financing of sports, particularly sports clubs, is predominantly sourced from public funds (whether state, county, or local budgets) depending on the regulations in force. Sports clubs also rely on sponsorships and applications for budgetary funds allocated by local or county councils, as well as private equity (Shibli et al., 2012).

In Romania, the analysis of the applicable legislation reveals that financing primarily comes from public authorities, with a smaller portion provided by sponsors or private funds.

Funding in Belgium

Public funding for sport in Flanders involves funding from towns and sports federations. In Flanders, towns are the primary public investors in sport, responsible for 73% of regular public funding for sport (Késenne et al., 2007). In 2017, the sports department was the fifth largest expenditure for Flemish towns, accounting for 4.9% of their budgets. Local administrations place a strong emphasis on subsidizing voluntary associations, with sports clubs estimated to receive €16.3 million in subsidies from local governments (Thibaut et al., 2015).

It is important to note that indirect subsidies, such as logistics and public service provision, though common, are not included in these figures. Subsidies from local administrations account for 8.6% of sports clubs' revenues (Scheerder & van Bottenburg, 2010). Késenne et al. (2007) estimated that approximately 85% of public funds are allocated to grassroots sports, while 15% support elite sports.

The Sports Federations Decree of 2017 provides two main subsidy channels for recognized sports federations. Federations can qualify for general grants to support their staff and running costs in exchange for fulfilling core tasks such as organizing competitive and recreational sports, supporting sports clubs, providing information, and promoting sports disciplines. Grants are awarded based on membership numbers and a set of quality criteria, including the scope of the federation, quality of supply, and good governance (Dolles et al., 2013).

This combination of quantitative and qualitative funding criteria allows the government to monitor the results of sports federations. Additionally, federations can apply for special policy actions (e.g., youth sports, accessible sports, innovation, summer camps, elite sports) for optional funding (Scheerder et al., 2013).

Funding in Spain

In Spain, sports funding primarily comes from public budgets, distributed among various authorities: the Consejo Superior de Deportes, Comunidades Autónomas, and local public authorities. Funding for competitive sports,

infrastructure, and sports development is drawn from government tax revenues. Unlike some European countries, Spanish sports funding does not heavily rely on lottery money. The primary sources of income are current taxes and tributes (Puig et al., 2003).

Other sources of money indirectly support sports and represent a small percentage of total income. Diputaciones Provinciales (associations of local councils) receive funds from these sources for local sports development. Similarly, professional soccer leagues receive lottery money to fund infrastructure development and safety at soccer fields (Ibsen et al., 2015).

The broad mission of sport allows for public funding through alternative budget lines. For instance, in Catalonia, the regional tourism department sponsored a golf tournament considered a tourist attraction. In addition to treasury funds, Spanish sport also features a mixed financing system based on collaboration between public authorities and private capital. Notable programs include:

The Asociación de Deportes Olímpicos (ADO) program, which targets elite sport development, mainly for Olympic sports, and is currently funded with €9.37 million for 486 grants distributed to 421 elite athletes and other development initiatives.

The Ayuda al Deportista Objetivo Paralímpico (ADOP) program, aimed at developing Paralympic sports, with an initial budget of €7.3 million, now increased to €10 million thanks to new sponsors.

Spain has approximately 44.509 sports clubs. Depending on the number of sports they offer, these clubs are affiliated with one or more of the 600 regional or territorial federations operating in each autonomous community. People engaged in sports represent 37% of the total population aged 16 to 75, with 21.2% practicing sports in clubs. Gender differences exist (28.5% of men and 15.1% of women practice sports in clubs). Despite diverse forms of sports practice, this does not necessarily indicate a weakening of the importance of clubs (Scheerder et al., 2011).

Spanish sports clubs predominantly developed after the 1980s, coinciding with the establishment of a public sector aimed at serving the population. The development of sports clubs was influenced by the need to position themselves relative to public bodies emerging at the time. It involved defining which aspects of public life each organization should serve and finding appropriate methods of collaboration for implementing sports policies and services for the population.

The relationship between clubs and the state must be understood in the context of Spain's social perception of the state's hegemonic role in public life, particularly post-Franco and during the early years of the transition to democracy (Burriel & Puig, 1999). This reflects a general perception of the need for public authorities to take a dominant position at certain times.

Funding in the Netherlands

The Dutch government invests in sport and uses it to achieve broader goals, such as influencing societal lag, promoting health and social cohesion, and creating a dynamic society. It also supports Dutch athletes waving their country's flag at international events and promoting Dutch sporting culture.

The Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sports is a significant source of funding for sports, providing grants and guarantees for sports-related matters such as health and welfare. The government also invests in sports infrastructure. For instance, coaches for performance athletes and gifted athletes receive direct funding from the government (Schwarz et al., 2018).

At the local level, sports development is supported through various programs and projects, with towns providing major complementary support for sports activities, especially for sports spaces (Ferkins et al., 2012). The government's involvement in sports is not constrained by a rigid legal framework but is guided by the "Public Welfare Law" of 1994, which serves as a general framework for regulating sports across different administrations.

The Public Welfare Law mandates that town authorities handle executive matters, such as facilitating sports activities and maintaining sports spaces. Provinces support these executive matters and act as intermediaries between local and national administrations (Vos et al. 2015).

Municipalities are obligated to promote sports, stimulate participation from certain groups, support local sports clubs, and oversee rural and urban development, including building and maintaining sports facilities and organizing special sports promotion projects in neighbourhoods and schools. They are also responsible for promoting performance sports and organizing top sports events (Felfe et al., 2016).

Funding in Romania

In Romania, the financing of sports, particularly sports clubs, is primarily sourced from public funds - whether state, county, or local budgets - according to the regulations in force. This funding is based on the Physical Education and Sports Law No. 69/2000 and subsequent amendments.

Order No. 664/6 of September 2018 concerning the financing of sports projects and programs from public funds outlines that public utility sports programs eligible for funding include:

- Program P1: Promotion of performance sports
- Program P2: Sport for all
- Program P3: Maintenance, operation, and development of the material base
- Program P4: Rediscover the sheep
- Program P5: Romania on the move

The budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sports also allocates funds to sports federations for their operational activities (Ferrell et al., 2018).

Methodology

The study was conducted with the help of a questionnaire, to gather opinions about the situation of sports in Romania, with the aim of making a comparison between our country and other EU countries.

The research focused both on the study of European and national sports policies and on the forms of financing in sports concerning sports clubs. We know that sport is a fundamental human right, recognized by major international organizations, and European sports policy has been gradually implemented over several decades.

The questions presented in the applied questionnaire were as follows:

1. *What is your opinion about the financing of sports in Romania?*
2. *What proposals do you have regarding the improvement of sports financing?*
3. *What should be the financial support from local and county public administrations for your club?*

Results

To these questions, all the answers are summarized below (Table 1, 2 and 3), for the purpose of analyzing relevant opinions from directly involved individuals regarding the current situation in the field of sports, specifically about its financing.

Table 1. Responses received for question 1

<i>"What is your opinion about the financing of sports in Romania?"</i>	
✓	The funding system is very weak, in some cases almost non-existent.
✓	The funding from the state is insufficient.
✓	Funding sources should be much more substantial and targeted by value categories, especially among children who are very talented and valuable but get lost along the way because they do not have sufficient funding sources to propel them.
✓	The government should be much more involved, as in the case of other EU countries.
✓	The funding system in Romania ranks among the lowest compared to other countries in terms of methods and level of funding.
✓	There are too few funding sources to achieve performance in this field.
✓	The funding system is chaotic; the funding from private sources and state budgets is not clearly defined or quantified, and because of this, it is not possible to conduct a correct analysis of the situation regarding the established or achieved objectives.
✓	Most small clubs are financed by town halls or local councils, without any other help.
✓	In some cases, there are no substantial funding sources, only occasional or small amounts.

Table 2. Responses received for question 2

<i>"What proposals do you have regarding the improvement of sports financing?"</i>	
✓	Substantial involvement of the private sector through the creation of facilities by local and central administrations.
✓	Creation of necessary levers for investments from the private sector.
✓	Establishment of clear laws regarding sponsorship or requests to certain large-profit companies to sponsor sports.
✓	Establishment of effective and easily applicable sponsorship frameworks.
✓	Supplementing existing aid to further develop the sports sector.
✓	More consistent financial involvement from the state in achieving performance and early education of children to achieve good results later.
✓	Creation of a more dynamic mechanism or clearer eligibility programs for sponsorships.
✓	Support from the government by covering certain fees or arbitration costs through county associations.
✓	Redirecting a percentage of profit taxes owed by large companies towards sports.
✓	Amending the sponsorship law to attract larger amounts of money for the sports sector.
✓	Sports funding should be directed towards infrastructure and clubs with youth and junior centers where more investment is needed.

Table 3. Responses received for question

<i>"What should be the financial support from local and county public administrations for your club?"</i>	
✓	Providing financial resources for the implementation of accessible and long-term projects at the club level.
✓	Local administration should invest more in sports infrastructure or component systems.
✓	Funds should be allocated from projects at the beginning of the year to enable necessary calculations for purchases during the year.
✓	Greater and consistent financial involvement from town halls, which often finance clubs differently based on various criteria.
✓	More consistent financial support from both local budgets and private sources.
✓	Allocation of a fixed annual percentage for sports from local budgets.
✓	Increasing the minimum funding threshold from state sources.

Based on these collected data, we can state that the local administration should invest more in sports infrastructure or component systems through consistent financial involvement from town halls, which finance sports clubs differently, because education or training policies for youth and sports play an important role in the knowledge-based economy, and these factors support economic growth and employment (Sruneanu, 2018). Therefore, it would be advisable to supplement the existing aid to further develop the sports sector (Breuer et al., 2015).

The enormous differences between the policies and visions in the field of sports in European Union states compared to Romania make the gap in results increasingly larger.

The preparation of society, in general, for practicing sports in most European countries compared to our country is evidently different (Eric et al., 2017). In Romania, reform in the field of sports is far behind compared to the desires and expectations of Romanians, and funding sources are often lacking.

The lack of investments in sports infrastructure, underfunding of sports, poor training regarding management and marketing techniques that must address these fields, make us look with distrust towards the future of Romanian sports in general.

A comparative test of the activities and achievements of some clubs from Western European states and some from Romania will reveal a harsh reality: the existence of those major differences in terms of the amounts by which they are funded, which also demonstrates the economic, social, and sports quality differences between Romania and many other European countries.

From this, we see that, regarding the financing of sports clubs, greater attention must be paid to the financing of sports clubs by commercial companies or legal entities, which is done in accordance with the Sponsorship Law and the Fiscal Code.

Discussion

If we synthesize the responses received from some sports club presidents, coaches, or individuals who are physical education teachers, we can observe a general dissatisfaction among them regarding the functioning mechanism, funding sources, or the level of state involvement in the field of sports.

Many of them highlighted various gaps in the system, starting from deficiencies observed at the lowest level to much higher levels, and the unanimous opinion

declared was that there are serious problems concerning this branch of sports, and if the situation is not corrected at the national level, the state of the sports system will become increasingly disastrous.

From the methods of financing to the sources from which they originate, there is a need to regulate legislation, as well as to increase the level of involvement from both the private sector and the state, because otherwise, the quality of sports will deteriorate more and more, and those who perform will prefer to leave for other countries or clubs where conditions are more suitable for sports activities and where they are financially supported much more.

We can tell that the main attributes of a manager are foresight, organization, coordination, training-triggering action, and one of the main functions of the manager is to prospect the future and initiate the necessary measures for the realization of an efficient activity.

Authors like Frederick Taylor scientifically analyzed management activity for the first time, with all its components and the most important elements of the management system, especially the organizational structure, evoking a series of rules and principles of scientific management that should form the basis of financing activities in any country.

Compared to other countries presented, the situation in our country is not at all brilliant, and in the absence of urgent and specific regulations, it will worsen in a few years (Russell et al. 2015).

Conclusion

Following the synthesis conducted on the financing of sports clubs and sports in general across different European states and the analogy with Romania, we see an enormous gap. Most European states have understood that sport in general is an engine of economic development for society and thus began many years ago to develop programs to support and develop the community from a sporting perspective.

In Romania, these decisions were taken only to a small extent and were largely left to the discretion of the population, which led to a major imbalance in terms of results. Furthermore, it was not understood that sport is no longer just an activity necessary for maintaining the health of the body, but it is often a business that operates on two correctly activated levers: one based on attracting fans and the other on generating competitiveness, performance, and benefits.

All these require adequate funding sources, and the delay in reform felt at the level of the entire Romanian society or the extension of the transition period will greatly slow down the restructuring and modernization of Romanian sports.

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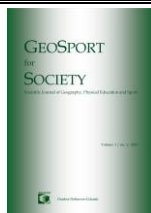
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New urban tourism in the Global South: The case of inner-city Johannesburg

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Abstract: The phenomenon of ‘new urban tourism’ is attracting growing scholarly attention. In many cities a strong trend is for visitors increasingly to leave the confines of tourist precincts or zones and instead to venture into new city spaces. This tendency has been linked to the growth of ‘off-the-beaten track’ tours in many urban destinations in the Global North. The aim in this paper is to explore the development of ‘new urban tourism’ in one leading tourism city in the Global South. Johannesburg inner-city is the geographical focus of the study. Using interviews with tour operators as well as tourists, the analysis charts the evolution and major features of off-the-beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg from their beginnings in the 2010s decade. Arguably, new urban tourists in Johannesburg are experiencing ‘edgy tourism’ as they explore spaces of an inner-city which, in recent years, has a tarnished reputation as no-go zone because of its physical decline as well as crime and grime.

Keywords: inner-city tourism, off-the-beaten track tours, new urban tourism, Global South, South Africa

Introduction

Urban tourism represents “*one of the most dynamically developing forms of tourism and, in many cases, one of the most important drivers of economic growth*”

(Panasiuk, 2019, p. 14). Indeed, it is considered by Postma et al. (2017, p. 95) that since the “*rise of mass tourism in the 1960s, city tourism has consistently been one of the fastest growing segments of the travel phenomenon in countries with developed economies*”. Until the 1980s, however, “*the academic literature on urban tourism was very limited*” (Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 7). Urban tourism as a significant and distinctive field of scholarship emerged only during the 1980s and 1990s (Novy, 2011). Despite the growth of cities as tourism destinations, for many years urban tourism was seen as a neglected dimension of tourism studies which was usually dominated by research on resorts or rural spaces (Nilsson, 2024). One observer in the 1990s could state that many “*academic books and papers are still written as if tourism only happens in coastal and ski resorts, and the role of tourism in urban economies is often ignored*” (Law, 1996, p. 1). The general view was that cities were considered mostly as generating sites rather than as reception areas in the tourist system. As articulated by Larsen (2019) much tourism research therefore exhibited an ‘anti-urban’ bias on the grounds that tourism was considered as an escape away from alienating and stressful cities to tranquil rural spaces and nature.

Over the past three decades attitudes towards urban tourism have reoriented and there has been a burst of research concerning various aspects of urban tourism (Pasquinelli, 2015; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a; Duignan and Pappalepore, 2023; Page and Duignan, 2023). Nilsson (2024) contends that this rise of academic interest is accounted for not only by the expansion of urban tourism but from the recognition of its economic importance and ramifications for local livelihoods and environments. In the 1980s city tourism experienced a fundamental directional shift which accompanied the march of deindustrialization that occurred across many cities of the United States and Western Europe (Law, 1996). The economic recession and severe distress catalysed a burst of interest in tourism as policy makers searched for new sectors to reinvent and renew their ailing city economies (Law, 1992 & 1993). In the USA urban policymakers viewed tourism as an economic panacea for the demise of traditional manufacturing activities and applied substantial funds to compete for visitors (Judd, 1995). Infrastructural investments were committed to waterfront dockland redevelopments, festival market halls, convention centres and sports stadia (Ioannides and Petridou, 2016). By the 2000s “*one would be hard pressed to find a single urban area within the United States that does not have some form of tourism promotion strategy*” (Ioannides and Timothy, 2010, p. 149).

In the post-industrial economy the importance of tourism, has been heightened for its implications for social, cultural, employment and revenue improvement (Khusnutdinova et al., 2019). As Maitland and Newman (2009, p. 1) pinpoint “*urban tourism has been an inseparable part of the transformation of many cities over the past several decades*”. Klepej and Marot (2024, p. 1) observe similarly that in recent times “*tourism has become one of the major drivers of development in cities*”. In particular, many cities both in Europe and North America used tourism as a vehicle to regenerate inner-city areas (Law, 1996). From a wider perspective the transformation of inner cities into standardized tourism enclaves or tourist bubbles was simply one facet of neo-liberal urban entrepreneurial strategies (Ioannides and Petridou, 2016). Scholars acknowledged that urban tourism needed to be considered seriously for its increasing

cultural, economic and social significance (Larsen, 2019; Nilsson, 2020). Tourism was further propelled onto the urban agenda by its transformative impacts in cities, including gentrification and the appearance of resident protests around ‘overtourism’ (Colomb and Novy, 2016; Koens et al., 2018; Dodds and Butler, 2019a & 2019b; Novy and Colomb, 2019; Milano et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Horn and Visser, 2023). Touristification precipitated changes in urban spaces and especially the complexion of certain physical urban environments with severe impacts for housing prices as well as for residents’ quality of life (Nilsson, 2020). As urban tourism overtook city spaces it has therefore become a topic of policy concern and an element in strategic spatial planning (Duignan and Pappalepore, 2023).

Arguably, tourism research should assume a more prominent role in urban studies “*that have been blind to the ever-increasing economic, social and cultural role of global tourism in shaping the everyday spaces of cities around the world*” (Larsen, 2019, p. 25). This observation applies equally well to cities in the Global South many of which have emerged as significant destinations for urban tourism (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a). Nonetheless, as is evidenced by the recent overview of scholarship on African urban studies, contributions on tourism are scarce (Croese and Wood, 2024). Against this backdrop the aim in this paper is to elaborate the debates around ‘new urban tourism’ and interrogate the recent development of ‘off-the-beaten’ track tours in one major African city. Our case study is Johannesburg which is South Africa’s commercial heart and largest city. The paper is a modest contribution both to international scholarship on ‘new urban tourism’ and the more specific literature on the shifting trajectories of tourism development in Johannesburg.

Literature review

Recently Gravari-Barbas (2024, p. 242) remarked that the “*tourism literature has paid limited attention to the spatial aspects of tourism*”. Over the past decade, however, the changing spatialities of tourism flows in and across city space have attracted scholarly attention. One observed geographical trend in many cities is for visitors to urban destinations increasingly to leave the confines of tourist precincts or zones and instead to venture into new city spaces, including residential areas (Stors and Kagermeier, 2013; Novy, 2018; Stors, 2022). For several scholars, tourism is expanding in ‘ordinary places’ as ‘new’ urban tourists “*are drawn to the mundane, the routine and the familiar*” (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 5). Smith (2019, p. 5) points out that traditionally the activity of tourism “*has been regarded as something that takes place in a distinctive part of a city – the ‘tourist bubble’ or ‘entertainment district’ – but it increasingly infiltrates a more diverse set of urban spaces and places*”. Indeed, it is evident that the spatial patterns of urban tourism are no longer confined to ‘tourist bubbles’ but have spread in geographical extent.

Novy and Colomb (2019) highlight that visitors increasingly have sought to experience ‘ordinary spaces’ which are situated outside of the traditional spaces of inner-city tourism. Beyond inner-city tourism precincts, an increasing trend therefore is for tourists to go ‘off the beaten track’, searching out the ‘backstage’ and places that are distinctive and uncontrived, not planned as tourism zones (Maitland, 2016; Novy, 2018). As is stressed by Pappalepore and Gravari-Barbas (2022) tourist

researchers are isolating the appearance of 'new urban cultures' associated with novel practices and places. Such new urban cultures developed as a result of visitors' desires to go outside of the traditional urban tourism precincts and to experience the city 'as a local', interact with local communities, to experience off-the-beaten track spaces in cities and be thrilled in engaging in the activity of urban exploration (Pappalepore and Gravari-Barbas, 2022).

Conventionally, the notion of getting off the beaten track has been strongly associated either with the activities and locational choices of backpackers who explore exotic destinations of rural or 'wild tourism' or of groups of adventure tourists journeying off the beaten pathways of tourism to engage in physical and sporting pursuits such as climbing, snowboarding or mountain biking (Hudson, 2002; Maitland, 2019). In recent years getting off the beaten track has become progressively relevant to cohorts of visitors to city destinations and "*central to the experience that some visitors seek*" (Maitland, 2017, p. 68). In many cities the axis of tourism is pivoting away from a reliance on exploiting tangible assets such as heritage sites, buildings or museums and towards a concern with intangible resources and the need for experiencing 'something different' (Maitland, 2017). It is considered that many urban tourists are becoming urban explorers in their quest to experience the real city (Maitland and Newman, 2009; Maitland, 2019). Nevertheless, Novy (2011, p. 2) makes clear that going 'beyond the beaten path' in cities is not a new phenomenon as it "*has been with us since the early days of commercialized urban tourism*". This said, what is new is "*the extent and breadth to which areas previously not visited, or less frequented by tourists and place consumers, are today integrated into cities' tourism and leisure trade*" (Novy, 2011, p. 2).

New urban tourists are looking for off-the beaten track experiences and drawn to the mundane, the routine and the familiar (Condevaux et al., 2016; Lim and Bouchon, 2017; Maitland, 2022). According to Dirksmeier and Helbrecht (2015, p. 277) new urban tourism is marked as specific varieties of practice being "*characterised by the complement or substitution of ordinary touristic activities like sightseeing or museum visits for encounters with ordinary, mundane, city life*". Stors and Kagermeier (2013) aver that tourists are 'coming of age' and crossing outside the tourist bubble and exiting the beaten track of well-known historic centres of European cities. One consequence is that some "*ordinary places are becoming tourist destinations*" (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 2). For example, the cases of Kreuzberg in Berlin or Islington in London show that "*former working class and/or peri-central immigrant neighbourhoods currently undergoing gentrification, are gradually becoming new tourism destinations*" (Condevaux et al., 2016, p. 7). In these areas, as well as others, such as Harlem in New York, new urban tourism contributes to increasing the value of historically marginal urban spaces (Novy, 2018).

According to Novy (2011) the advance of tourism developments in marginalized neighbourhoods of cities must be understood as the outcome of a complex of interrelated trends which are connected to broader processes of urban restructuring and change. Arguably, these changes are inseparable from the following: "*post-industrial shifts of contemporary cities' economies; changing patterns of business and leisure; new geographies of capital accumulation; changing conversion*

of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use; increasingly sophisticated forms of cultural commodification; as well as 'new' tourist demands and tourism strategy formations" (Novy, 2011, p. 3). In another perspective on the rise of new urban tourism Gravari-Barbas (2021) explains the phenomenon in relation to the emergence of tourism-rental platforms. She describes new urban tourism as a 'platform-led' tourism and inseparable from digitalization and the explosion of social media.

Overall, for Pasquinelli (2015) new urban tourism necessarily must accomplish two different missions. First, it is essential that new urban tourism transcend the narrow notion of a tourism city as an enclavic tourism space which is disconnected from the ordinary life of the city. Second, "*city tourism requires a shift from 'staged authenticity' to the promotion of 'the ordinary as authentic', thus challenging traditional destination products and promoting a revision of the notion of competitive destination"* (Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 15). Nevertheless, it remains that off the beaten track tourism does not oppose the traditional 'mass' tourism in urban tourism precincts rather it serves to complement it (Delaplace and Gravari-Barbas, 2016).

Methodology

At the outset this research was informed by a set of methodologies. One, a bibliographical analysis of international literature on 'new urban tourism' and off the beaten track tours. As is evident from the above review the existing scholarship is nearly entirely focused on city destinations in the Global North. Two, the study is anchored further on literature concerning the specificities of urban change and restructuring in Johannesburg. This necessitated the collection and analysis of material relating to both broad patterns of urban spatial change in the city and the specific evolutionary pathways of tourism in the inner-city, particularly over the last 30 years. The study therefore builds upon a small group of research studies which have documented the contours of tourism development in the 'difficult' and challenging environment of Johannesburg inner-city (Rogerson, 2002; Rogerson and Kaplan, 2007; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2016; Rogerson, 2020) and of the specific issues around the operations and impacts of alternative 'off-the-beaten track' tours in the city (Frenzel, 2014; Hoogendoorn and Giddy, 2017; Frenzel, 2018 & 2020; Opfermann, 2021). Three, field research and structured interviews were conducted with eight operators of inner-city tours in Johannesburg. This facilitated an audit of the current extent and characteristics of off-the-beaten track tours taking place in the inner-city and its surrounds. Four, the findings from a survey completed with 127 tour participants provides insight into the nature of 'new urban tourists' in Johannesburg. The survey contained 17 questions and explored variously the demographics of visitors and sought to understand the tourists' knowledge of Johannesburg inner-city, their expectations and experience of the inner-city tours.

Results

Two subsections of results and discussion are given. The first provides context on Johannesburg as a tourist city and in particular of the historical evolution of tourism in the inner-city. The second turns to present the findings from the empirical

work undertaken on the development of off the beaten track tours and new urban tourists in South Africa's major city.

Tourism Development in Johannesburg

In its history "*Johannesburg was designed and built by Western architects, planners and developers after the discovery of gold in the area*" during the 1880s (Baro, 2017, p. 43). Indeed, Nuttall and Mbembe (2008, p. 18) stress the constant aspirations to develop the city into a metropolis focused on Western models and for the making of "*the largest and most modern European city in Africa*". As South Africa's most economically vibrant city Johannesburg always has been a visitor destination from the time of the city's foundation as a mining settlement camp during the late 19th century. Typically for any large city the nature of the Johannesburg tourism economy was multi-purpose and included visitors arriving for business, visiting friends and relatives, and for leisure reasons (Rogerson, 2002).

Tourism promotion of the city began at a small scale as far back as the 1920s with the activities of a local publicity bureau (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2019). But, with a booming manufacturing economy from the 1940s and the growth of a strong commerce and finance sector, throughout the apartheid years (1948-1991) tourism was only a minor component of the economy of South Africa's 'City of Gold' (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). From 1980 a major restructuring of Johannesburg's economic base occurred. At this time the traditional role of mining had been eroded and the significance of the city's manufacturing economy overtaken by the rise of an economy articulated around finance services, insurance, real estate and business services (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2015). The sector of tourism remained generally neglected in urban policy making until after the 1994 democratic transition when the economic base of Johannesburg was in a state of flux as the manufacturing sector in the post-apartheid (post-1994) period experienced the impact of growing international competition. With decreased local competitiveness of local industry, the march of factory closures and escalating unemployment by the early 2000s Johannesburg city authorities identified tourism as a potential 'sunrise sector' to contribute new employment opportunities and growth momentum. The tourism sector became a focus for strategic intervention as part of wider restructuring of the urban economic base and rebuilding the landscape of post-apartheid Johannesburg (Murray, 2008; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2015). An additional benefit from tourism promotion was city re-imaging and improving the reputation of Johannesburg as an investment destination (Rogerson, 1996).

Johannesburg had become synonymous with unregulated street trading, poor urban management, abandoned and badly maintained buildings, unauthorized squatting, overcrowding, neglected public spaces and general disorderliness" (Murray, 2011, p. 88). In consequence the inner-city acquired *"a tarnished reputation as a tense and dangerous place of crime and fear, with its inhospitable thoroughfares of dehumanized speed and impersonal gloom, massive skyscrapers, and cold buildings cut off from the surrounding streets"* (Murray, 2011, p. 88).

With lack of investor confidence in the inner-city the physical deterioration of properties and environmental degradation continued to progress (Rogerson, 2020). From the mid-1990s the inner-city experienced accelerating decline and the exodus of businesses to suburbs such as Rosebank and the emerging new CBD of Sandton (Turok et al., 2021). This decline was mirrored in the status of the inner-city within Johannesburg tourism; between 2001 and 2011 despite some initiatives for regeneration the share of the inner-city in total tourism spend fell from 17.2 to 15.1 percent (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2016). The cycle of decline in the inner-city was exacerbated by escalating levels of crime and violence amidst the deteriorating physical environment (Murray, 2011). A striking symbol of the demise of Johannesburg inner-city for tourism was the progressive run down in occupancies and eventual closure in April 1998 of the prestigious and former five-star Carlton Hotel (Rogerson, 2020). Equally telling was the downgrading of the status of several other of the cluster of leading hotels that were situated in the inner-city.

From the early 1990s the quality standards of tourism accommodation services available in Johannesburg inner-city deteriorated radically as the geographical pivot of the international visitors and of the business tourism economy gravitated away from the inner-city to the Rosebank and Sandton areas (Rogerson, 2014). Lack of investment in tourism properties and disinvestment from the CBD of leading hotel chains were manifestations of an inner-city tourism economy experiencing a spiral of decline. As summarized by Murray (2011, p. 91) with collapsing revenues and the loss of the traditional white middle class clientele as well as the market of international tourists *"once-fashionable five-star hotels either shut down or purposely downgraded their facilities, offering no-frills service, long stay rates, and Spartan accommodation in response to changes in the market demand and social composition of customers"*. In addition, it was observed that *"smaller and older hotels in the inner-city transformed themselves into nightclubs, brothels or drinking establishments catering to low-income, marginally employed customers"* (Murray, 2011, p. 91).

By the early 2000s in terms of international tourism cities Johannesburg represented a 'non-traditional' destination in which the tourism sector was considered as a promising source of new job creation and economic vitality with several interventions enacted to drive fresh waves of tourism expansion (Rogerson, 2004). The destination of Johannesburg offered a range of tourism assets and products (Rogerson and Kaplan, 2005). For leisure travellers, the city's upmarket shopping malls and shoppertainment complexes (including casinos) were major attractions for both domestic tourists and travellers from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Geographically the major shopping areas are situated in the city's plush Northern suburbs (around Sandton and Rosebank) with Sandton City,

Montecasino and the Mall of Africa as the leading foci. Other popular attractions for domestic leisure travellers continued to be the city's zoological gardens, parkland areas and botanical gardens found in the Northern suburbs, and the Gold Reef City theme park situated in the south of Johannesburg (Figure 1).

As part of its endeavors for tourism promotion the city authorities since 1994 sought to upgrade and market a range of new cultural and heritage attractions aimed at both domestic and international tourists (Rogerson, 2004). The most significant are Constitution Hill, Newtown, the apartheid museum (situated next to Gold Reef City) and 'poverty' or township tours to Soweto, a major focus of the anti-apartheid struggle (van der Merwe, 2013; Booyens, 2021). The Maboneng Precinct, a cluster of creative industries occupying formerly abandoned or degraded warehouse space and part of the renewal initiatives surrounding the inner-city, was another newer leisure node for both domestic and international visitors (Murtagh, 2015; Gregory, 2016; Goo, 2017).

New Urban Tourism and Off the Beaten Track Tours

Tourism in the inner-city and its surrounds has been troubled and stagnant most especially since the early 1990s. Informal business tourists in the form of cross-border shopper/traders increasingly came to dominate the tourism landscape of inner-city Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2018; Zack and Landau, 2022). Leisure tourism was in a state of precipitate decline. Among others Baro (2017, p. 47) observes the "*Inner-city of Johannesburg has suffered from its negative image when it comes to visitors avoiding it*".

At a time when both private and public sector initiatives for inner-city regeneration were taking root, however, the 2010s decade witnessed the launch of a new kind of leisure tourism for inner-city Johannesburg. This sub-section seeks to elaborate the essential characteristics of 'new urban tourism' in Johannesburg and of the tours made available in Johannesburg inner-city. The green shoots for the inner-city tourism economy were sown by the innovation of a different genre of tours for the inner-city to those which had existed in earlier periods and during the apartheid years (Rogerson and Kaplan, 2005; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b). For Opfermann (2021) the establishment of off-the-beaten track touring within the perceived 'dangerous spaces' inner-city Johannesburg was both daunting and innovative.

Table 1. Thematic Foci of Inner-city Tours

Thematic Focus	Number of Tour Offerings
History (Heritage)	18
Food	13
Art	7
Architecture	3
Culture	3
Education	2
Nightlife	2
Adventure	2
Lifestyle	1

Note: Several themes are evident in many tours

Table 1 presents the findings of an audit that was conducted of the different tours that were in operation in inner-city Johannesburg. At the time of the audit (2018-2019) at least ten tour companies were identified as operating various kinds of off the beaten track tours in Johannesburg inner-city. Eight of these ten companies participated in the study and provided details of 36 different tours on offer. The broad thematic foci of each tour was categorized and as shown in Table 1 emphasized different experiences. It is evident that the largest number of tours concentrate on aspects of the history of the inner-city as a whole or of specific areas such as Fordsburg, Hillbrow or Newtown. A second major thematic focus is food and seeking to expose visitors to the diverse range of food experiences that exist in the inner-city (Naicker and Rogerson, 2017), including those from migrant communities from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A third focus is around art, both public art and graffiti, which is widespread across much of the inner-city and with a cluster around the Maboneng precinct (Parker et al., 2019). Architecture and culture are explored in several of the tours. Finally, there are certain highly specialized tours that seek to profile the inner-city as a space of adventure in terms either of experiencing its nightlife or as a fun zone where visitors engage in activities such as pub crawls, skateboarding or lifestyle fitness challenges.

The works of Frenzel (2014, 2020) pinpoint the manner in which the growth of inner-city tours contributed to place-making initiatives that sought to counter negative place representations of inner-city spaces. As is stressed by Frenzel (2014) several inner-city tours aim to address the territorial stigma that impacts these spaces in Johannesburg. The tour operators seek to introduce visitors to different, little-known elements of the inner-city. The tours take place both in daytime and in the evenings and can involve different modes of mobility including walking, cycling, skateboarding and use of minibus taxis. In terms of the group size often there is no minimum and private tours for one person are welcome. Tours all have a determined starting point which allows the tourists to meet the guide at a specific location. The tour operators select a starting point that is easy to locate, often in a public place that is designated near major and safer public transport routes including parking or metered taxis. In terms of the actual tour routes, each route is clearly marked out in order to ensure safety of the tourists. Within these demarcated spaces there is provided private security in order to ensure the security of both tourists and tour operators.

Figure 2 maps out the attractions that are visited in the 36 different tours that are offered. These areas are evidence of various sites of historical significance, attractions and exciting activities and tour stop overs. The tourism assets of the Johannesburg inner-city are considerable and include the iconic Nelson Mandela Bridge, several museums and heritage sites, food markets and art centres. It should be noted that the route itineraries are carefully planned in order to ensure the safety of the tourists. According to the tour operators the inner-city tours are not only aimed at challenging perceptions but also are uniquely designed to showcase the heritage of the inner-city and profiling places that have much history that people can learn from.

Information and insight on Johannesburg's new urban tourists was gleaned from the survey completed with 127 tour participants. Table 1 reveals a profile of the new urban tourists visiting Johannesburg inner-city. Three points are worth highlighting. First, is that off-the beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg are mainly patronised by a relatively younger cohort of travellers. The results showed almost two-thirds of tour participants were under 40 years of age and nearly 90 percent under 50 years. Second, in terms of gender representation the survey captured a larger share of women respondents than men in terms of tour participants. Three, the country of origin of tour participants reveals the notable finding that the majority of tour participants are local South Africans who account for almost two-thirds of the patrons of inner-city tours with international tourists accounting for 37 percent of the total. The caveat needs to be made, however, that the numbers of international tourists inevitably would have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as the period of data collection spanned the period from August 2019 to March 2020. The cohort of South African tour participants including residents of Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria but overwhelmingly was dominated by local residents from Johannesburg who made up 83.8 percent of the South African cohort. The high representation of local Johannesburg residents' points to the increasing blurring of boundaries between locals and residents in tourism (Page and Duignan, 2023). Of the group of international tourists participating in Johannesburg off the beaten track tours the largest flows as captured in the survey were from USA, the United Kingdom and Brazil. Smaller participation was noted from Germany as well as from visitors from several countries in sub-Saharan Africa including Angola, Nigeria and Gabon.

Table 3. Tourists Source of Knowledge of Inner-city Tours

Source	Frequency	Percent (%)
Referral	58	45.7
Social media	45	35.4
Internet browsing	7	5.5
Accommodation provider	13	10.2
Other	2	1.6
No response	2	1.6

Table 3 shows the source of information for tour participants. It reveals that the most important is word of mouth referral followed by social media which impacted a total of 80 percent of the sampled tour participants. Tourists are therefore most likely to participate in a Johannesburg inner-city tour as a result of a referral or recommendation by someone who had already participated and shared their tour experience. The role of social media is clearly significant, and it was evident that the tour operators use social media platforms in order to disseminate tour information, promotions or images. Referrals from accommodation service providers emerge as the third most significant base for visitors to acquire knowledge and information about inner-city tours.

The research explored reasons behind participation in the tours. Several factors surfaced as relevant. Many participants were interested in taking the tour as an educational experience. Learning about the inner-city history and culture including

exploring the architecture of the city, the style of the buildings, and manner in which they were built were widely expressed. Interest in art and graffiti was another basis for participating in tours. One tourist stated that “I honestly love street art, so I wanted to see what the tour is all about”. Other tourists disclosed that they participated because they wanted to meet new people and to ‘interact with locals’. Others stated that they wanted to ‘try something new’ and go ‘off the beaten track’. Interest in local food and drink was another impetus for touring with one respondent declaring: “I came across their website and enquired and saw delicious food that they had posted so ended up taking a tour”. For other mainly local participants, the reason they took the tour was simply to have ‘fun with friends and family’. The meaning of ‘place’ as a theme also stood out as it signified tourists’ connection with the city. Notwithstanding the above, most visitors undertook tours because it was either recommended by someone else: “My friend and I were told about the tour before coming to South Africa so we were told it is a ‘must do’ experience of Johannesburg”. This statement once more reinforces the importance of word of mouth or reviews by previous participants for influencing the decisions of others in taking the inner-city off-the-beaten path tours.

Questions about tourist expectations of the tour elicited a range of responses. The most common related to ‘explore the city’ as well as ‘see historical sites’. Other important expectations were ‘to meet new people’, ‘learn about the culture’ or expectations of experiencing a variety of art, food and drinks. Some participants indicated that they expected the tour to be ‘community orientated’ and ‘to meet locals’. Many visitors expected to see positive change and transformation of the inner-city whereas others expected to see crime and grime. One tourist observed that “*I expected to see nothing more than crime, abandoned buildings and getting robbed. But all was replaced by an awesome experience that proves we should not judge or make assumptions*”. Tour participants were asked to identify the aspects of tours which they found to most memorable or enjoyable. It emerged that “learning” about the architecture, art, history, culture and language was what most tourists enjoyed. The positive change through tours and within the city was mentioned as tourists felt that the tours advocate for social and economic change. The built environment of the inner-city as well as opportunities to take photographs was another feature that tourists enjoyed as well as having fun with friends and relatives. Food and drinks were another memorable experience for many visitors. One respondent stated that he “*enjoyed eating everything at loads of different places*”. Another participant highlighted that “*we had an opportunity to sit down at the local restaurant and eat some local food so there were locals there in the same place*”. Nightlife was another form of local interaction where tourists are able to visit bars and clubs and interact with other locals, sing and ‘dance the night away’.

The theme of interacting with locals was highlighted by many respondents who considered its importance for allowing mutual understanding between locals and visitors. The majority of the responses focused on tourists having a conversation with the locals and learning about local history, culture and language. Another aspect that the tourists enjoyed was the social interaction with the guide as this form of relationship enabled visitors to feel welcome and safe. It is evident that there no

specific criteria for tour guides apart from the fact that guides needed to know the area that they are taking people to and be passionate about being a guide. Indeed, in many instances the tour guide was from the specific area for visitation and familiar with the community. One tour guide reflected that *“with the tours that we do, you have to be passionate about it and love it also. It is not a job and because you live it, you have to live in it as well”*.

Finally, tour participants were asked whether the tour had altered their perspective on the inner-city. A mix of positive and negative responses were evidenced. Most tour participants expressed views about a positive transformation taking root in the inner-city. The city government and private sector have undertaken clean-up efforts as well as improved safety to make the inner-city a safer space to navigate and thereby triggering a change of many visitor perspectives as they had expected an unsafe environment. Other visitors stated the tour of the inner-city changed their perspective because they were able to meet new people and that the ‘community’ was friendly towards them. Other participants considered that the tour altered their perspective on the inner-city because they had learned a lot about the local history and local culture. As a whole, the opinions were expressed that tours contributed a changed perspective because it made participants more “socially aware”. For a minority of participants, the tour confirmed their preconceptions about the insecurity of the inner-city. One respondent stated: *“I still think it is not safe. Hence we walked in safer streets as the security company was visible along our route”*.

Conclusion

The international growth of tourism in inner cities records a chequered history. The rise of new urban tourists is the most recent wave of change to reshape inner-city tourism. As has been demonstrated, the phenomenon of new urban tourism is characterized by the increased tendency of tourists to experience contact with everyday life in ordinary residential spaces (Dirksmeier and Helbrecht, 2015; Lim and Bouchon, 2017; Maitland, 2022). One significant consequence is the making of new geographies of urban tourism which are pointing towards places ‘off the beaten track’ as visitors’ search for distinctiveness away from the usual tourism bubble or district of many cities.

Extant literature concerning new urban tourism and new urban tourists overwhelmingly is dominated by studies of cities in the United States, United Kingdom or Europe. This paper contributes a fresh insight on new urban tourism from a city destination in the Global South. Over the past 30 years the central spaces of Johannesburg have undergone tumultuous change (Turok et al., 2021). Off the beaten track tours in inner-city Johannesburg began to develop in the 2010s decade. New urban tourists in Johannesburg experience what Frenzel (2020) styles as ‘edgy tourism’ as they navigate spaces of an inner-city which, in recent years, has had a tarnished reputation as a no-go zone because of its physical decline as well as a syndrome of crime and grime. Understanding the unfolding impacts of this new urban tourism for contributing towards the fragile renewal initiatives taking place in Johannesburg inner-city is a critical research issue for both scholars of urban studies and tourism.

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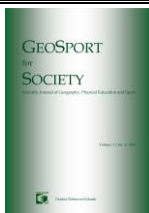
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Enhancing motor skills and coordination in middle schoolers through innovative physical education programs

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Abstract: New activities during physical education and sports classes attract children to the desire to exercise. This study, which involves two hours a week for a school year (8 months), in which children can experience new materials and learning tools during sports lessons, will improve their coordination and motor skills. The tests that the subjects of the experimental group will complete will bring coordination skills and the development of sensory perception. 3 of the tests used are for the development of kinesthetic sensitivity and 1 test will be for sensory-motor coordination. The results will show significant differences between the experimental and control groups after carrying out the program with the new work materials. In conclusion, the program carried out in the physical education and sports classes for two semesters led to significant improvements in terms of sensory-motor coordination and kinesthetic sensitivity of 10-14-year-old secondary school students.

Keywords: coordination, physical education, middle school, sensory-motor, motor skills

Introduction

Early childhood is considered an ideal age period for the development of fundamental movement skills (Karachle et al., 2017). Yasumitsu and Nogawa (2010) said that an exercise program intervention that incorporates rhythmic play could improve coordination skills in preschool children and even satisfy their needs in a way befitting early childhood development. Sabău et al (2023) indicates that, as an educational discipline, it has a predominantly formative character, aiming at the preparation of subjects for life and emphasizing harmonious physical development, the development of basic motor skills needed in everyday life. Physical activity is one of the essential components of human existence which, together with intellectual activity, ensured the uniqueness of our species on the evolutionary path of the biosphere (Şandra et al., 2022). Szabo et al. (2020) support that the fundamental components of the agility skill are coordination and movement control.

Physical education is one of the most important subjects in the school curriculum because it directly targets the health and development of children (Papp et al., 2019; Erdely et al., 2020; Giurgiu et al., 2023). Also, adults are involved in this type of education precisely to improve work performance, general well-being, socializing with other practitioners, and the development of communities channeled towards the development of the movement (Ilieş & Caciora, 2020). The child's preoccupations will have to be oriented towards the functions of balance, static and dynamic, as well as general dynamic coordination, as a prelude to his socio-familial integration, as an immediate objective, and socio-productive, as a perspective objective (Albu et al., 2009). Boreham and Riddoch (2001) indicates that it is clear, despite their natural tendencies, children have become less physically active in recent decades. As an educational discipline, it has a predominantly formative character, aiming at the preparation of subjects for life and emphasizing harmonious physical development, the development of basic motor skills needed in everyday life (Domenico et al., 2022; Sabău et al., 2023).

Developing coordination during puberty is extremely necessary and effective due to the assimilation of knowledge by children at this age (Bulz et al., 2020). The fundamental role of proprioceptive training in children's sports is very important (Galea, 2014; Bondoc-Ionescu, 2017). This stage is a recommended stage for learning motor skills specific to some sports, as well as for developing coordination. In specialized literature, the term coordination is often used to refer to skill, precision, accuracy, balance, and mastery. These are closely related and represent an individual's adaptation to a new environment and his ability to perform harmonious movements and quickly combine new movements in the shortest possible time and with low energy consumption (Marcu & Matei, 2009; Şandra et al., 2023a and b).

In Manno (1992) conception, motor capacities represent a set of human predispositions or motor potentials on which learned motor skills are built. A sufficient or optimal level of motor capacity development allows for many sophisticated skills.

The most favourable period for the initiation of coordination is at the beginning of puberty, that is, up to 11-12 years, after which learning becomes motor of a spontaneous type, through imitation it gradually disappears, giving advantage to

rational thinking through analysis, decision, creation, an idea not accepted by Tudor, V., in 2001, who considers the age of 15 years for boys and 13-14 years for girls is the age at which motor coordination can be best developed.

Chagas et al. (2016) said that it is recognized that children with a marked impairment in the development of motor coordination may show difficulty in gaining knowledge in schools. Breaz (2019) begun from the premise that performances in the field of coordinative capacities can be improved through operational models from the age of puberty. Another study from Iordăchescu and Orțănescu (2022), argues that the coordinative skills play a fundamental role in the child's physical development.

This study analysed the situation in Oradea's schools. We found that the development of coordination would be much more effective if we used current materials and means in physical education and sports classes. The objectives of this study are to educate the ability to coordinate, develop coordination, develop motor skills, and develop sensorial perception.

Materials and methods

Subjects

In this study, 101 students from 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th classes from Dacia High School in Oradea were involved. The experimental group consisted of 21 students (11 girls and 10 boys) from 5th grade, 33 students (16 girls and 17 boys) from 6th grade, 25 students (13 girls and 12 boys) and 22 students (7 boys and 15 girls from the 8th grade.

The control group consisted of 98 students, 19 students (11 girls and 8 boys) from 5th grade, 30 students (14 girls and 16 boys) from 6th grade, 25 students (13 boys and 12 girls) from 7th grade and 24 students (13 boys and 11 girls), from the 8th grade.

This extensive study on the development of coordinative abilities in secondary school students included 199 children between the ages of 10 and 14.

The proposed program was applied for a scholar year (8 months), 2 times a week, after the experimental group's schedule of physical education and sports classes, and the control group performed sports classes after the school curriculum normally.

Tests used

Purdue Pegboard

The student must insert the chopsticks from the right side of the board with the right hand for 30 seconds. He will do the same thing on the left side with his left hand. In the 3rd part of this test, the student inserts the chopsticks simultaneously with both hands.

Movement precision test and eyes-hand coordination

The objective of the test is to accurately execute a two-hand takedown from the bottom after a pre-roll. Five repetitions are performed and the percentage efficiency is calculated. The subject is in the starting position behind the starting line (the bottom line of the volleyball court), performs a forward roll on the mat, a quick lift, a move to a ball offered by a partner from the opposing court and a two-handed catch

from the bottom to fixed point. The ball picked up by the subject must be directed towards a square with a side of 2.5 m located near the net in zone 2.

Hand dexterity test

The student has 1 minute to transfer as many of the given 150 cubes (side 2.5 cm) as possible from one side of a box to the other. The score is given by the number of cubes transferred. The student is given 15 seconds before the test to prepare.

Distance appreciation test

It is a test of distance appreciation, the route is executed in two halves with a break. The subject must cover the distance on a straight line of 9 meters drawn on the ground with his eyes closed and stops when he considers that he has covered the 9 meters, waiting motionless. The go signal is given after the subject has closed his eyes. During his movement, the subject is not allowed to use different reference points (number of steps, etc.) and must keep his eyes closed throughout. After stopping, he must wait motionless to check the distance covered.

Materials and exercises proposed and used for the development of coordinative capacity

To achieve the proposed objectives, we used materials like:

Elastic cord (fixed in the wall), speed leather, swiss ball, bosu ball, balance plate, application courses, relays, diferent balls (handball, basketball etc), gymnastic bench, cones. Table 1 shows in detail all the materials used, together with the exercises developed through them, providing a clear and structured organized record of the related resources and activities

Tabel 1. Materials and exercise that we have done in this study

Materials used	Exercise
Agility leader	Raising left/right knee bent to chest Stepping inside each square; Swinging the left/right leg back with a step inside each square; Hops on two feet in each square; Hops on one leg in each square; Jumping on two feet close inside the square and Jumping with the feet apart outside the square; Side jumps on two feet with entryand exit from the square; Quick side steps to the left/right with both feet stepping in each square. From standing sideways to the ladder, step forward and backward in a square of the form "one in-two out"; Running with a step forward in a square and exit with the separation of the legs laterally in the form "in-in-out-out";
Elastic cord	The rope attached to the middle of the trunk in the harness, accelerated running as far as possible to stretch the rope and return; The rope attached to the middle of the trunk in the harness, running with the back until it allows the rope to stretch and return; Rope attached to mid-torso in harness, walk with added or crossed steps in basic; Basketball/handball position as far as possible to stretch rope and return; The rope caught by the hands, the imitation of throwing the handball ball;

<p>Swiss ball</p>	<p>The rope caught by the hands, imitating the throw to the basket; With the rope attached to the hands, throwing balls of different sizes and weights;</p> <hr/> <p>Plank position from high support, outstretched legs supported in balance on the ball, hold 15 sec. Lying on your back, heels balanced on the ball, raising your pelvis off the ground, hold for 5 sec. return. Lying on your back on the fitness ball, knees bent, feet on the ground, arm extension and return; Lying on your back, the fitness ball between your ankles, rise to the square position, hold for 5 sec. and return; Lying face down on the fitness ball, contact with the ball in the thigh area, between the arm and forearm at a 90o angle, extension to the forearm on the arm and return; Lying on your back, arms outstretched with the ball caught between the palms, lifting into a square position and moving the ball between the ankles, the exercise is repeated; Sitting in balance on the ball, flexion and extension of the trunk with the arms at the side; Lying face down on the fitness ball, contact with the ball in the thigh area, trunk extension; Sitting in balance on the ball, flexion and extension of the trunk with the arms at the side.</p>
<p>Bossu Ball</p>	<p>Jumping on two feet on Bossu Ball; Jumps on the left/right leg; Ascending and descending alternately with the left/right foot on the Bossu ball; Jumps from the ground on the Bossu Ball and rebound; 90 degrees, 180 degrees, 360 degrees turn jumps on the ball with balance maintenance; Standing on the boss in one leg, the opposite arm up, maintaining the position 20 sec From support on the Bossu Ball with the flat side up, grabbing the edges, by jumping bringing the knees to the chest in squat support, and returning to the initial position; Throwing the handball/basketball with two hands from the chest into the Bossu Ball and catching it; Basketball hoop shot with Bossu Ball; Throw at the handball goal with a beat on Bossu Ball. Running with a step on Bossu ball placed longitudinally or zig-zag; From standing sideways to the ball, lateral jump from one leg to another alternately on the Bossu Ball;</p>
<p>Relays and applied courses</p>	<p>Running, walking in balance on the bench, jumping on two legs on the Bosu Ball, jumping on one leg on the Speed Ladder, bypassing the milestone and jumping on the other leg when returning; Running, running forward with both feet stepping squarely and stepping one foot out to the side in a "two-in-one-out" ladder, throwing at the target and returning with the same exercises;</p>

Driving the Swiss ball through the posts, dribbling with the Swiss Ball through the posts, sitting on the Wobble Board, turning 360o in sitting;
Running, going around a milestone 360 degrees, moving with the trunk bent, rolling forward from squat to squat, climbing the fixed ladder and returning with the same exercises.

The methodology and materials used in this study were carefully chosen to support the development of middle school students' coordination and motor skills through various exercises and innovative equipment. These activities included the use of a diverse set of materials such as bossu ball, swiss ball, bungee cords, balance boards, cones, gymnastic benches and balls of various types, all designed to provide a dynamic and attractive training environment for students. The proposed exercises have been adapted to age groups and abilities, emphasizing activities that develop balance, motor coordination, kinesthetic sensitivity and the ability to perform precise movements, from exercises on the agility scale to jumping on the bossu ball or transfer exercises of objects.

The program has been structured to be attractive and stimulate students' active involvement, encouraging them to develop both their physical strength and the cognitive abilities needed to control complex movements. The methodical approach was intended not only to improve the physical performance of the students, but also to provide them with a meaningful and diversified learning experience that meets the specific needs of their developmental age. Implementing these innovative materials and exercises in physical education classes thus provides a solid basis for the development of coordination, contributing to students' overall progress on a physical and motor level.

Results and discussions

In this sample, the test was done for the right hand, for the left hand and for both hands. On the right hand, the experimental group had an average of 16.4 chopsticks inserted in 30 seconds during the initial tests, and the control group an average of 16.8 chopsticks inserted. The left hand had an average of 15.7 chopsticks in the initial tests in the experimental group and 15.7 chopsticks in the control group. In the last test with both hands at once, the average in the initial tests was 11.6 chopsticks inserted in the experimental group and 11.6 chopsticks in the control group. We see that the values are very close, the subjects being at about the same level in the initial tests (Figure 1).

At the final tests, we noticed that the progress of the experimental group was much better than that of the control group. On the right hand, the average in the final tests was 22.3 chopsticks inserted in 30 seconds, an average of almost 5 chopsticks more than in the initial tests. The control group had an average of 19.8 chopsticks inserted in 30 seconds during the final tests. On the left hand, the experimental group recorded an average of 22 chopsticks, and the control group an average of 19 chopsticks. We also observe here an increase of approx. 6 chopsticks in the experimental group, compared to the initial tests. In the test of both hands, the average of the experimental group was 17.7 chopsticks at the final tests, and the

control group had an average of 14.6 chopsticks. And in this test, the progress of the experimental group was approx. 6 sticks more than the initial tests.

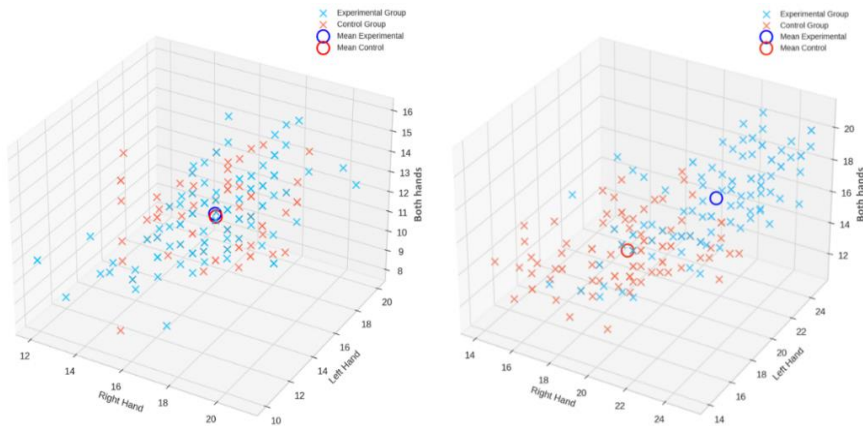


Figure 1. Purdue Pegboard initial test (left) and final test (right) on the experimental group and the control group

We mention the fact that the subjects of the experimental group from the 6th grade had the best progress in the right hand and the left hand, with an increase of 6.5 (right hand) more sticks and an increase of 6.5 (left hand) more sticks in the final tests than in the initial tests and in both hands, the most notable progress was made by the 5th grade subjects of the experimental group with an increase of 6.4 sticks more in the final tests.

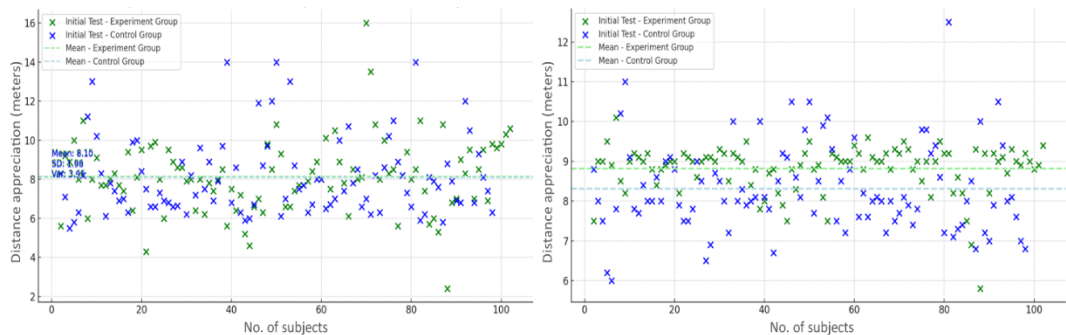


Figure 2. Movement precision test and eyes-hand, representing the initial test (left) and the final test (right) on the experimental group and the control group

In the movement precision and eye-hand coordination test, the following results were obtained: in the 5th grade, the experimental group achieved an average progress of 2.5 attempts between the initial and final testing. The differences between tests of the control group in the 5th grade was on average 1.5 trials between the initial testing and the final testing (Figure 2).

In 6th grade, the experimental group progressed an average of 2.4 trials between tests, and the control group progressed only 1.3 trials. In the 7th grade, progress was

evident in the experimental group compared to the control group. In the initial tests, the experimental group had an average of 2.3 attempts and in the final tests they reached an average of 4.6 attempts, the progress between the two tests being more than 2 attempts. The control group had an average of 2 attempts in the initial tests and of 3.8 in the final tests, between tests being a progress of 1.8 attempts. The 8th grade had an average of 2.2 attempts in the initial tests regarding the experimental group and an average of 2.1 attempts in the control group. At the final tests, the experimental group had a progress of 2.2 attempts, the average reaching 4.4 attempts. The control group reported an average of 3.7 attempts, the progress being 1.6 attempts more (Figure 2).

The average of the experimental group at the initial tests was 2.1 attempts and at the final tests the average was 4.4 attempts. The progress was +2.3 successful attempts. In the control group, the average in the initial tests was 2 attempts and in the final tests the progress was +1.7.

In the hand dexterity test, we notice that the control group recorded a better average in the initial tests, and in the right hand, with an average of 55.3 cubes, compared to 53.9 in the experimental group, and in the left hand where the group of control had an average of 54.5 cubes compared to 53.6 cubes achieved by the experimental group (Figure 3).

In the final tests, we notice that the experimental group made much greater progress and surpassed the control group, having an average of 61.2 cubes on the right hand compared to 57.9 cubes achieved by the control group. On the left hand, the average of the experimental group was 60.4 cubes and the average of the control group was 56.8 cubes. All classes registered a significant progress, the 6th grade having the greatest progress, having an average of 8.1 more cubes between the 2 tests on the right hand and an average of 7.8 more cubes on the left hand (Figure 3).

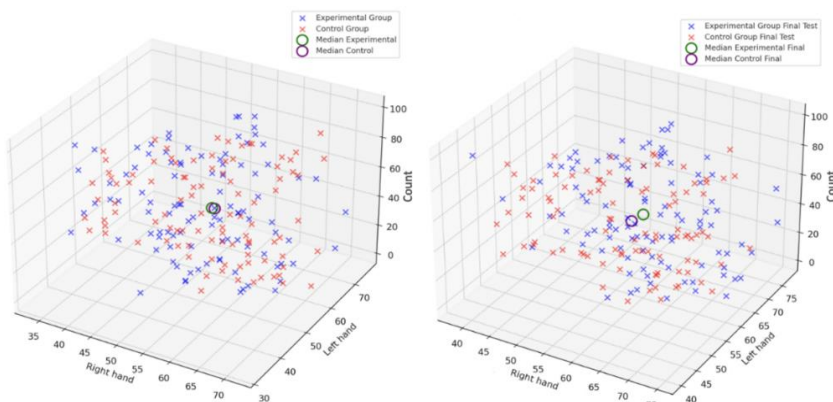


Figure 3. Hand dexterity test, representing the initial test (left) and the final test (right) on the experimental group and the control group

Even if in the initial tests the control group recorded better results, the final tests bring a much better progress of the experimental group compared to the control

group, the averages obtained reflecting the clear difference of approx. 4 extra cubes for each hand in the final tests.

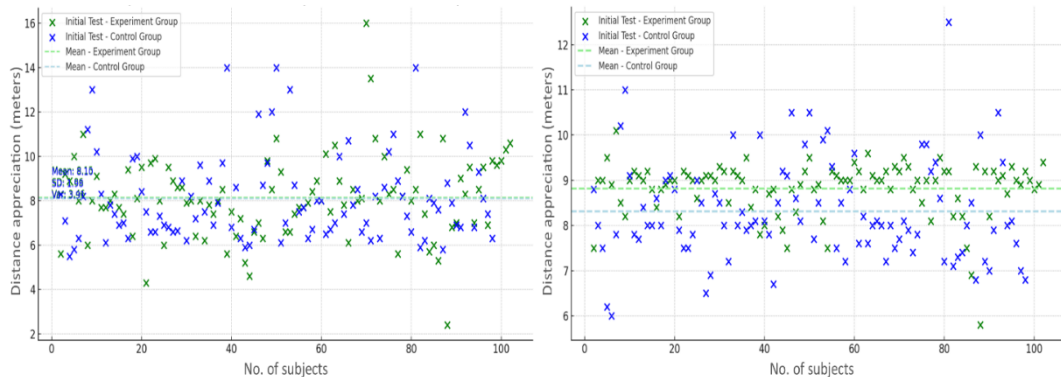


Figure 4. Distance appreciation test, representing the initial test (left) and the final test (right) on the experimental group and the control group

In this sample, the initial tests' average was 8.1 meters in the experimental group and 7.9 meters in the control group. We note the 6th grade, with an average of 8.7 meters in the experimental group and 8.3 meters in the control group. At the opposite pole was the 5th grade, with an average of 7.1 meters in the experimental group and 7.8 meters in the control group.

At the final tests, the average of the experimental group increased to 8.8 meters and the average of the control group was 8.2 meters. In this test, the experimental group of the 5th grade made the greatest progress, whose average increased from 7.1 in the initial tests to 8.6 in the final tests, a progress of 1.5 meters. We see better progress in the experimental group, whose average increased from 8.1 in the initial tests to 8.8 in the final tests. The control group registered insignificant progress, from 7.9 meters in the initial tests to 8.2 in the final tests (Figure 4).

Progress was observed in more than 80% of subjects in the experimental group and only 35% of the control group progressed.

Following the application of the "t" test, the results recorded in this test are significant. A highly statistically significant difference was found in the means of the experimental group compared to the control group. As can be seen in the graph, at the final test the experimental group came very close to the 9-meter threshold that had to be covered according to the test description, which proves that the sensory-motor coordination of the subjects in the experimental group improved.

Conclusions

By introducing new materials and means to the physical education and sports classes at the gymnasium, we observed a significant improvement in the general coordination, kinesthetic sense and cognitive abilities of the students in this study. Introducing the lesson exercises with Swiss ball, Bosu ball, agility ladder, elastic rope, etc., we obtained considerably improved final test results. The control group that did the physical education lessons after the school curriculum and did not use the means

and materials used in the experimental group had insignificant progress.

The use of bossu ball and swiss ball in lessons led to an improvement in balance and motor skills in over 78% of the tested subjects. Also, the use of the agility ladder and the elastic rope attached to the wall considerably improved general coordination, resistance to short-term intense efforts, but also a clear cognitive development in more than 70% of the participants in this study. In the test for movement precision and hand-eye coordination, the progress was also with 2 more successful executions than the control group. The balance exercises on the bossu ball and walking in balance on the benches during the applicative courses helped to considerably improve the results of this test.

Swiss ball provides a variety of challenging exercises, not just for the core, but for the upper and lower body as well and this fact helped to concentrate more and better on tests that require fine coordination. Maintaining positions on bossu ball and swiss ball, which require both core and upper body strength, helped to develop general strength and body balance in over 80% of the participants in the experimental group.

The use of these helpful materials during physical education and sports lessons and finding the right exercises according to the potential and age characteristics of the classes led to significant improvements in all tests. More than 80% of the students who were part of the experimental group recorded remarkable progress, which gives us perspectives for the future.

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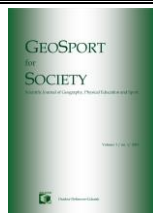
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The development of determining motor qualities in children aged 10-12

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Abstract: Physical preparation is one of the most important components of sports training, supporting specific technical expressions to achieve sports performance. The lack of physical preparation in the training process for 10–12-year-old children, in the football game, can lead to the impossibility of developing the technical and tactical attributes they need during the match. The 10-12 years age group represents the most accessible period in the process of training young footballers. Thus, it is possible to act efficiently on the development of motor qualities, speed, and coordination, and motor qualities determined in the game of football at this age category. Thus, this study aims to evaluate and develop the main motor qualities we act on at this age in the football game. For the evaluation and development of the two qualities, a battery of tests was prepared that evaluates the speed and coordination of the players, and training plans were created to develop these determining motor qualities in the game. At the end of the research, it was observed that the progress between the initial and final testing is obvious, with the majority of players making progress between the two tests.

Keywords: physical training, motor skills, assessment, speed, coordination

Introduction

Modern football is a game with discontinuities of movement but of great intensity. During the match, players perform high-intensity sprints, alternating with light running, jumping, rolling, turning, kicking, heading, etc. The higher the player's

training level, the higher the energy requirement and global stress during the game (Bompa, 2001; Ilieş & Caciora, 2020; Ilieş et al., 2021; Kozma et al., 2023).

Sports training represents a long-term adaptation process, which takes place over a period of several years, for which effective management can only be achieved on the basis of the scientific provision of sets of objectives, decisions and means. In this sense, the planning process must comply with certain requirements related to the particularities of age and training of the subjects (Dragnea & Teodorescu, 2002; Savescu & Sandra, 2021; Giurgiu et al., 2024; Herman et al., 2024).

Physical preparation is one of the most important factors in sports training (Papp et al., 2019; Erdely et al., 2020; Sandra et al., 2023a and b). The physiological attributes necessary for sports success are developed through adequate physical training. These physiological adaptations are the basis on which technical and tactical advances are built. In the absence of physical skill development, the athlete's ability to tolerate training will be substantially diminished, leading to the impossibility of developing the technical and tactical attributes he needs to succeed in reaching his maximum level. The main obstacle to adequate technical and tactical development is, most frequently, accumulated fatigue, which can be avoided by developing the physiological base, through a structured physical training (Bompa, 2014).

Speed is the main characteristic of the modern football game; thus, according to the FIFA manual (2016) (Figure 1), this motor quality will be acted upon between 9 and 13 years of age when the children's nervous system is much more adaptable.

Coordination is an essential motor quality representing the interaction between the nervous and muscular systems during movement. As in the case of speed, the optimal age to be able to act effectively on motor quality, coordination is between 8-13 years (Figure 1).

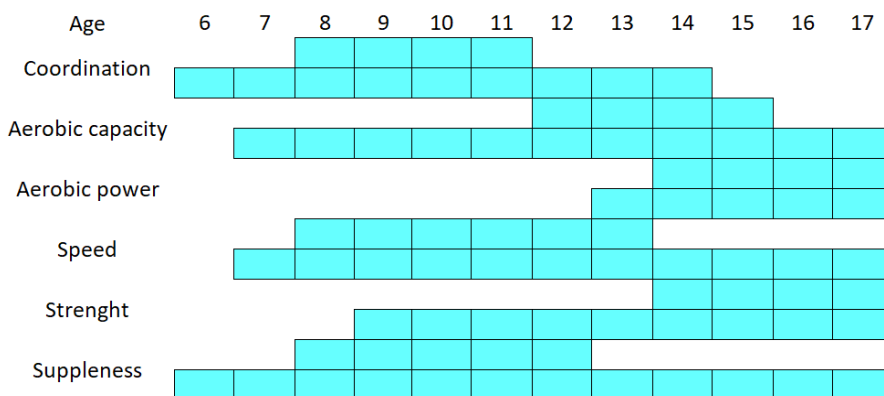


Figure 1. Model of sensitive phases for the development of motor skills in children and juniors

Speed is a basic motor quality, which depends on the type of nervous system of the subjects, this determines a more difficult development, compared to the other motor qualities. In the game of football, movement speed does not refer to running from one fixed point to another, as for example in a sprint, but to a speed specific to the game (Avram, 1980). Analyzing the specific speed of the football game, we can

refer to several components: running at speed with movements adapted to the game, the need to execute technical elements quickly and safely, speed of thought and specific tactical combinations, quickly executed, with spontaneous reactions to unforeseen interventions of the opponent etc (Sandra et al., 2022).

In programming and planning speed training, two fundamental principles must be respected, namely: The first and most important is related to intensity, which must always be maximal. The second is never to reach the fatigue threshold (Dumitrescu, 2014). Thus, for children aged 10-12, the speed can increase up to the equivalent of 83% of the maximum yield, the duration of the exercises will be between 4-6 seconds and specific drive systems will be used, such as executions, game sequences, fast attacks, which through positive transfer increase the speed potential (Dumitrescu, 2014).

Ciolcă (2006) defines coordination as the complex motor ability (psycho-neuro-motor) based on the ability of the central nervous system and neuro-muscular to determine finely differentiated, coordinated, and precise movements in time and space, in the most varied conditions, and with maximum spontaneity.

In the game of football, especially in children and youths, the components of the coordinative abilities (aspects of kinesthetic differentiation, spatial orientation ability, balance ability, reaction ability, segmental coordination, motor adaptation and readaptation ability) are required in abundance. The degree of coordination that a football player can reach is conditioned by the type of higher nervous activity, age of initiation, multilateralism and polysportivity, sports mastery and sports life. The performance capacity in the football game is influenced to a very large extent by this motor quality, it is in a close connection with the other motor qualities, the motor area, and the analysis capacity available to the respective player (Ciolcă, 2006).

Scheduling and planning training aimed at motor skills and coordination is essential in the preparation of future athletes. Thus, it is necessary to act on coordination without which the technique of the football game is inconceivable. In this age stage of 10-12 years, there is a decrease in the amount of general skill exercises in relation to the exercises specific to the football game (Dumitrescu, 2014). The motor qualities of speed and coordination are a factor of progress in terms of the dynamism and fluency of the soccer game. In this context, this study aims to determine the level of preparation from the perspective of motor qualities (speed and coordination), in the LPS Bihorul Oradea U12 football team, the development of these two determining motor qualities in the game of football in children aged 10-12 years and not finally, determining the quality of the means used in training during the research.

Materials and methods

The research was conducted over a period of 6 weeks, during which the initial testing and the final testing were carried out. The football team, on which this study was carried out, is made up of children between the ages of 10 and 12 and carries out its activity, having a number of 3 training sessions per week plus a friendly/official match. This team was in the pre-competitive period when the training program aimed at developing speed and coordination was implemented.

Tests used

The 10×5 m shuttle has as its objective the assessment of speed in coordination mode. To apply this test, two parallel lines located at a distance of 5 m from each other will be drawn with tape for marking/two stakes will be placed at a distance of 5 m from each other. The subject will position himself next to one of the lines/one of the stakes, with one of his feet further back. At the starting signal, he will have to run as fast as possible to the other line, crossing it with his feet and then running to the starting line. One run is one cycle, 5 cycles are required for this test.

Speed running for 30 m aims to assess the speed of acceleration, so the departure is made from behind the starting line, the run is made at the highest speed, exceeding the finish line by another 2-3 m to avoid slowing down before the 30m. Timing starts when the back leg lifts and stops when the performer's chest crosses the finish line.

The Denisiuk test aims to assess general coordination. The test consists of running 5m, going around a flag 360 degrees, running, rolling forward, running, going around the second flag 180 degrees, running in bent support, rolling forward, going around the flag 360 degrees and arriving at the place where He left. The mattress is arranged in the middle of the distance between the two flags. The return route measures 30m and is timed

The Matorin test aims to assess general coordination. The test consists of performing a standing jump, followed by as many rotations as possible around the longitudinal axis of the body. The test is applied by drawing a line of approximately 30-35 cm on the ground. The subject sits with his feet close to either side of the line. For measurement, a compass and a 40-45cm ruler are used, placed between the soles of the subject after landing. Jumps are performed with rotations to the left, then to the right, recording the values achieved in both directions.

The physical training of athletes in this age category, 10-12 years, is fundamental, especially from the perspective of motor qualities, speed and coordination. Thus, after obtaining the results of the initial testing, a detailed analysis was made regarding the preparation of the children from the perspective of these two qualities. The following training program was created and proposed for a period of 6 weeks in which action was taken on the development of speed once a week on Wednesday and on the development of coordination twice a week on Mondays and Fridays.

Table 2. Presentation of the means and their dosage regarding the development of speed

Speed development	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III	Cycle IV	Cycle V	Cycle VI
<i>Intensity</i>	90-95%	90-95%	90-100%	90-100%	95-100%	95-100%
<i>Duration</i>	5-8 min	5-8 min	5-8 min	5-8 min	5-8 min	5-8 min
<i>Charging time</i>	4-5 sec	4-5 sec	3-6 sec	3-6 sec	3-7 sec	3-7 sec
<i>Duration of rest</i>	45-90 sec	45-90 sec	45-90 sec	45-90 sec	45-90 sec	45-90 sec
<i>Means used</i>	4×7 m	4×7 m	4×12 m	4×12 m	3×10 m	3×10 m
	3×15 m	3×15 m	2×15 m	2×15 m	4×15 m	4×15 m
	2×20 m	2×20 m	2×25 m	2×25 m	2×30 m	2×30 m
<i>Frequency</i>	Once a week	Once a week	Once a week	Once a week	Once a week	Once a week

For the Wednesday of each week, action on speed development was scheduled and planned. The means used to improve speed were the classic ones that consist of running at different distances and repeated a certain number depending on the distance run (Table 2). Each training session dedicated to speed development was preceded by a very carefully directed warm-up, especially to prepare the body for effort but also to avoid certain injuries.

Table 3. Presentation of the means and their dosage regarding the development of coordination

<i>Development of coordination</i>	<i>Cycle I</i>	<i>Cycle II</i>	<i>Cycle III</i>	<i>Cycle IV</i>	<i>Cycle V</i>	<i>Cycle VI</i>
<i>Intensity</i>	95-100%	95-100%	95-100%	95-100%	95-100%	95-100%
<i>Duration</i>	15-20 min	15-20 min	15-20 min	15-20 min	15-20 min	15-20 min
<i>Charging time</i>	20-25 sec	20-25 sec	20-25 sec	20-25 sec	20-25 sec	20-25 sec
<i>Duration of rest</i>	45-60 sec	45-60 sec	45-60 sec	45-60 sec	45-60 sec	45-60 sec
<i>Means used</i>	Warm up with the small string ball	Warm-up with the small string ball in pairs	Warm up with the small string ball	Warm-up with the small string ball in pairs	Warm up with the small string ball	Warm-up with the small string ball in pairs
	Ladder exercises	Ladder exercises with the small string ball	Ladder exercises	Ladder exercises with the small string ball	Ladder exercises	Ladder exercises with the small string ball
	Relays /Games	Relays /Games	Relays /Games	Relays /Games	Relays /Games	Relays /Games
<i>Frequency</i>	Twice a week	Twice a week	Twice a week	Twice a week	Twice a week	Twice a week

On Mondays and Fridays, training specific to the development of coordination was scheduled and planned. To improve this quality, means such as scaled exercises were used, different types of movements, first without the ball, then with the ball, games in pairs that required the coordination of both players. The main means used to develop coordination was to perform exercises with a small ball tied with a string. These exercises involve the body's ability to control body movements, especially the coordination between the lower and upper limbs.

Results and discussions

During the 6 weeks in which the two training programs specific to the development of speed and the development of coordination (table 2, table 3) were implemented in the children's training, two tests were also carried out (final test, initial test), and after them we obtained the following results.

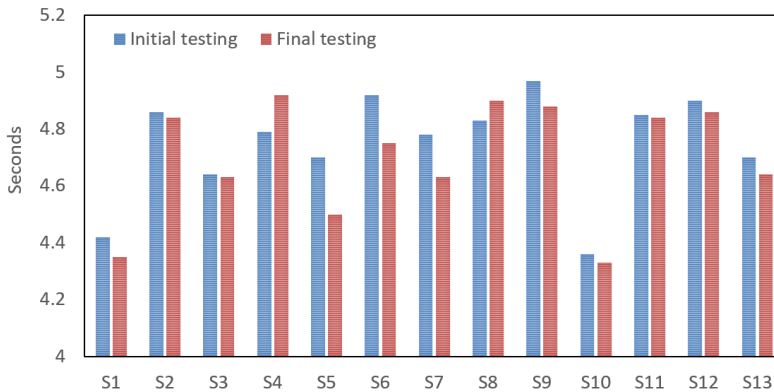


Figure 2. The results obtained by the subjects at the initial test and the final test at the speed running test over a distance of 30 m

By applying this test, we tried to evaluate acceleration speed which in the game of football has a very important role. The results obtained were satisfactory, and a slight improvement in the time obtained in the final testing compared to the initial testing can be seen (Figure 2). Most of the players in this test achieved better results in the final test compared to the initial one. Comparing the results with the 5th grade physical education rating scale of motor skills, all players achieved results below 5.5 seconds, thus all team players scored 10 in this test, both in the initial and final testing. The best result was 4.33 seconds, and the worst was 4.9 seconds, these results being obtained in the final testing.

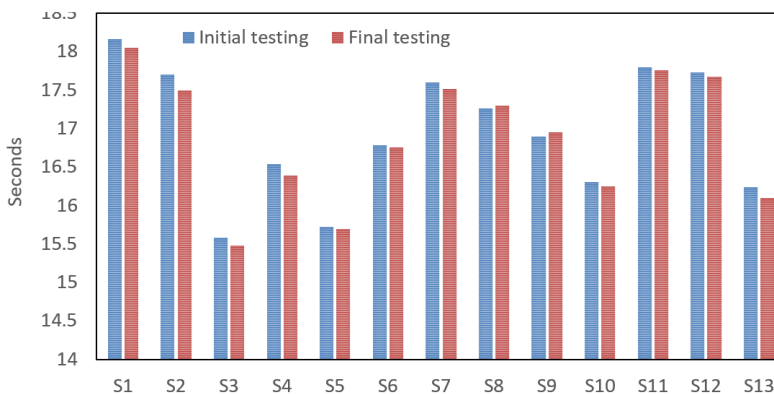


Figure 3. The results obtained by the subjects at the initial test and the final test at the Shuttle 10x5 m test

The 10x5 m shuttle test has as its main objective the assessment of speed in coordination mode, and most players achieved positive results in both the initial and final testing. Coordination speed in football is characterized by many changes of direction that occur in a match. Even though the application of this test also evaluates the movement speed, the players who obtained the best results in the speed run over a distance of 30 m did not obtain equally good results in this test, this can be seen in figure 3. By performing the test, we found that many players have problems with

direction changes, and in the future this detail should also be focused on. The best result was 15.5 seconds, and the worst was 18.1 seconds, obtained in the final testing.

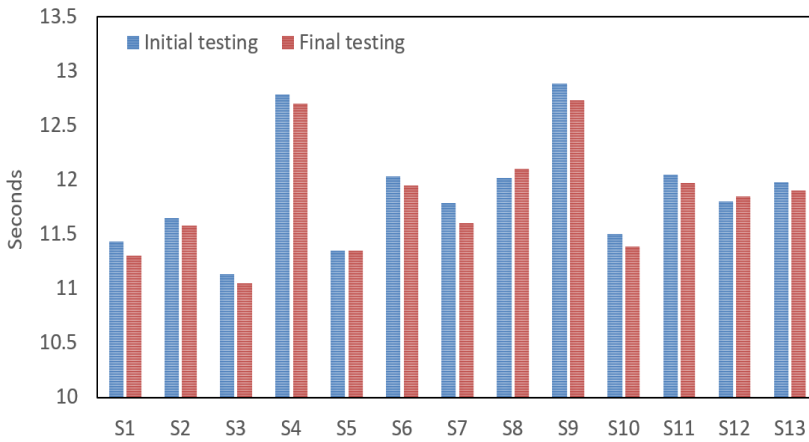


Figure 4. The results obtained by the subjects at the initial testing and the final testing at the Denisiuk test

After applying the Denisiuk test, as well as in the two tests presented previously, two team players obtained worse results in the final test than in the initial one. Only one player achieved the same time in both the initial and final testing. The obtained results are satisfactory because during a match, the players often encounter such movements that are also found in this test. In figure 4 we notice that most players did not pass the 12-second threshold, both in the initial testing and in the final testing. Also, in this graph, you can see two players who achieved results close to 13 seconds, but you can also see a small progress of them compared to the initial testing. The best result was 11.1 seconds, and the worst was 12.7 seconds, these results being obtained in the final testing.

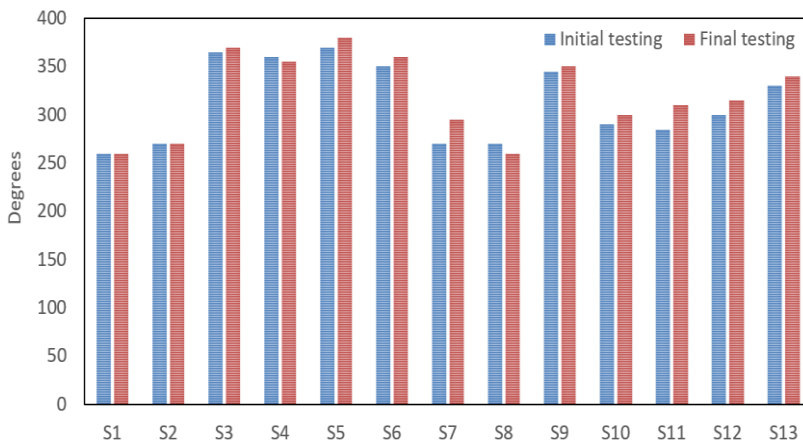


Figure 5. The results obtained by the subjects at the initial testing and the final testing at the Matorin test – left foot

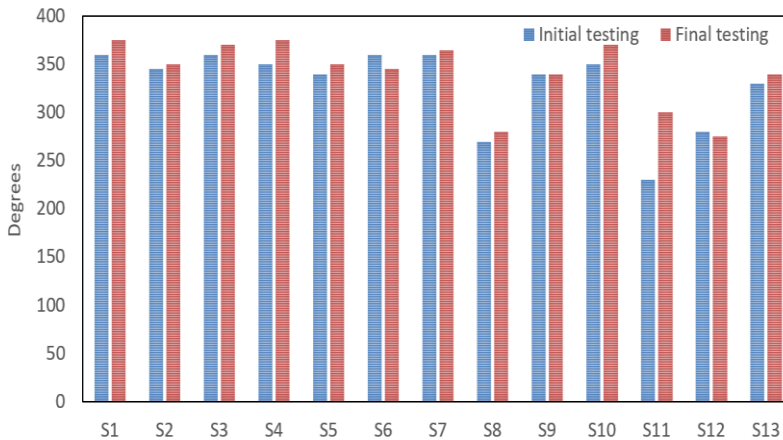


Figure 6. The results obtained by the subjects at the initial testing and the final testing at the Matorin test – right foot

After running this test, only one player scored below 270 degrees in the initial test (right), all other players scored above 270 degrees in the initial test (right). In figure 5 it can be seen that the player who obtained the worst result in the initial testing (right), had a progress of 70 degrees in the final testing (right). The results obtained after performing the test on the left side are not as good as those obtained on the right side, one of the causes may be that most of the players in the team are right-footed players. However an S3 right-footed player achieved a result of 370 degrees in the final test. Matorin equated the performance over 360 degrees with the qualification "very good". Thus, when performing the test towards the right side, five players obtained the qualification "very good", and when performing the test towards the left side, three players obtained the qualification "very good". The best result obtained towards the right side was 375 degrees, and the weakest 275 degrees. On the left side, the best result obtained is 380 degrees, and the worst is 260 degrees (Figure 5 and 6).

Conclusions

Following the research carried out, we were able to evaluate the determining motor qualities in the football game at this age level. Speed and coordination are probably the main motor qualities that children encounter during practice or a match at this age. Most of the training of this team is based on the development of individual techniques, which in turn require very good coordination. Certainly, the other motor skills will also be addressed in the future, which also have an important role in developing these children as future footballers.

The training level of the children at the initial testing was normal, consistent with the current demands in the game of football at this age. Through this study, we wanted to highlight the degree and level of progress in a 6-week training period for 10–12-year-old children in the soccer game. The study occurred during the preparation period, after the children returned from winter vacation. The means of intervention used in the development of these motor skills were classical and standardized means.

After implementing the proposed program for the development of motor skills, speed, and coordination and following the results obtained, we can say that the approach to training athletes in this age category is correct.

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The impact of dance on fitness: Physical and educational benefits for high school students

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Abstract: Dancing, similarly to all sports, requires excellent stamina and mobility. It improves physical performance, sense of rhythm, mental and psychological development, and shapes personality. Our research examined dance's effect on high school students' fitness status. Our goal was to explore the role of dance education within school frameworks in developing individual abilities and skills. Therefore, we examined the effect of school dance programs on fitness and compared the outcome with the results of students who only participated in daily physical education classes. Furthermore, we studied the effect of folk dance on the performance of students who have dance and physical education classes at school. During our research, we carried out the NETFIT (National Uniform Student Fitness Test) test, as well as an online survey at three schools: Ferenc Medgyessy Grammar School and Vocational Technical School in Debrecen, at Nyíregyháza Art Vocational High School and Esze Tamás Grammar School in Mátészalka. The students of these schools participated in three different exercise programs. The members of the first group had dance classes only, the students of the second group took part in physical education classes besides dancing, and those in the third group did not participate in any form of dance movement at school. The research results show that dance, besides its influence on personality development, has a beneficial effect on fitness and is essential in creating a healthy lifestyle. The outcome of the tests proves that students who, in addition to physical education, participate in a dance exercise program reach significantly higher performance and fitness levels. The results also highlight that many students participating in the dance program choose some kind of sports activity outside school as a hobby.

Keywords: folk dance, dance and fitness, folk dance benefits, aerobic endurance, NETFIT assessment

Introduction

Education for a healthy lifestyle aims to maintain a balanced and positive mental state. A healthy lifestyle has many components, such as correct and adequate food intake, regular exercise, stress management, the ratio of rest and working time, spiritual and mental development, establishing realistic life goals together with a health-conscious lifestyle and social relationships (Barabás, 2006; Gyömbér et al., 2012; Müller, 2017; Müller & Bácsné, 2018; Kinczel & Müller, 2023). To establish a healthy lifestyle, it is essential to highlight the importance of health awareness. Therefore, it is strongly advised to start regular exercise and lifestyle education at a young age (Király & Szakály, 2011; Ferenczi & Lenténé, 2021; Židek & Müller, 2024). This is what the 2011 CXC. Act on National Public Education aims to foster the introduction of daily physical education in public education institutions from the 2012/13 academic year. The measure has proven effective and constructive over the last decade (Nagy et al., 2018; Borbély, 2019; Müller et al., 2022).

In Physical Education and Health Development, Physical Education and folk games appear as new subjects in the framework curricula. For 32 sessions, divided into two grades, folk dance is optional for students (Reiner et al., 2022). The framework curriculum focuses on teaching folk dance to strengthen the national heritage and develop social relations.

Dance is a form of movement focusing on aesthetic aspects, has sovereign expressive power, embodies the diversity of rhythmicity, and adapts to the accompanying music, thus establishing a uniquely wonderful new world. (Antal, 2010; Ónodi, 2017). Due to the connection between dance and music, students also get a musical experience while exercising (Molnár, 1983). Dance develops spatial perception, improves posture, movement coordination, the sense of rhythm, and other essential skills, so it fosters learning processes in general and affects everyday life (Antal, 2002; Jakabné & Fügedi, 2004; Antal, 2008). The movement material of dance improves all the central organ systems and other physical and mental abilities. (Nemessuri, 1976; Harsányi, 2000 and 2001; Makszin, 2007). In dance, physical performance is an artistic expression (Lezó, 2022). Due to their multifaceted developmental and motivational effects, dance forms dominate our leisure and fitness trends (Müller et al., 2013, 2017 and 2019; Boda et al., 2019).

The question often arises as to whether dance is to be considered a sport or a form of art, as there are areas, such as competitive dance or folk dance, which involve competition and require severe preparation and training (Pesovár, 1984; Prókai & Schulteisz, 2015). An appropriate level of physical fitness is essential for performance and successful participation in competitions of various levels. Moreover, much practice is necessary for the movements to be perfect and clean (Bányai & Sólymos, 2001; Chuprun, 2018). Dance also has a personality-forming effect, as positive experiences can shape behavioral patterns. In addition, dance plays a role in developing moral attitudes, such as discipline, assertiveness, social behavior, activity, cooperation, empathy, and self-awareness (Timár, 1999; Láng, 2020).

Recently, to improve performance, great emphasis has been placed on introducing new types of additional training to dance education, as the continuous

expansion of the body's physical limits is becoming increasingly critical in dance (Lezó, 2022).

Materials and methods

Our study aimed to explore the role, level, and effect of music-dance movement education in secondary schools. Our research examined whether the fitness indicators of the three groups we chose differ regarding their strength and endurance indicators. We also explored whether the students attending the dance program pursue any sport outside the school framework.

To answer our questions, we measured the fitness status of 67 young people participating in three different programs at three high schools. The students in the first group learn folk dance only in grammar school and have an average of twenty dance lessons per week. Three students also go to dance classes outside of school and have been dancing since they were six.

In the second group, students learn to dance at school and attend three physical education classes a week. These participants have been dancing since childhood, on average, for ten years. In addition to physical education classes, the students participate in an average of twenty folk dance lessons per week, significantly increasing their overall exercise. Three students in this group also attend folk dance classes outside of school. Most students in both groups pursue sports as a hobby besides dancing.

The students in the third group do not participate in any dance exercise program; they attend five physical education classes a week at school. However, several of these students do some other physical exercise regularly.

For the research aim, we used the mandatory, uniform method of measuring fitness in the Hungarian public education system, which was developed by the Hungarian Student Sports Association (MDSZ) in collaboration with the Cooper Institute (Kaj et al., 2014). This unified test system serves as an evaluation and reporting tool for physical education teachers and provides up-to-date information on students' fitness status (Szakály, 2019). The fitness measurement system distinguishes between four fitness profiles, including different fitness tests.

During our research, we assessed three profiles: Body composition and nutrition profile, which consists of measuring body weight and body height and determining the body mass index; the Aerobic fitness (endurance) profile, which was based on a 20-meter endurance shuttle run test, and the Skeletal fitness profile, which included a scheduled abdominal and push-up test, and a test providing information on the strength and extensibility of the core extensor muscles. The test system compared the state of fitness to criteria adapted to gender and age. Based on this, students were divided into three categories: "Healthy," "Needs Improvement," or "Needs Significant Improvement." A student who falls into the "Healthy Category" is likely to be less prone to diseases associated with physical inactivity in the long term. Those who perform less well were placed in the other two categories, where attention was drawn to the fact that more exercise and sports activities are needed to achieve a healthy state of physical fitness (Kaj et al., 2014). In each institution, a tool package,

a manual, and an instructional film containing the assessment protocol were available. The results were processed using the Microsoft Excel program.

Results and discussions

Aerobic fitness index

Based on the results measured in the 20 m endurance shuttle run test, it can be concluded that the aerobic performance of each group is different. The best-performing student (1520 m) belonged to the group of students who had dance classes only. The student who does not participate in any form of dance movement at school performed similarly well (1300 m). At the same time, this group also included the students whose endurance proved to be the weakest. He was able to run only 280 meters.

The students with the best performance on average (831 m) were members of the group participating in the dance program at school, while those participating in five physical education classes a week reached the lowest aerobic fitness level; they were able to complete an average of 655 m on the running test.

The results showed a considerable difference in the performance of the students participating in the five physical education classes per week. Examining the other two groups, we found that the results of the students participating only in the dance program were similarly heterogeneous in terms of performance. The most homogeneous group was the group that had physical education classes in addition to dance classes (Figure 1).

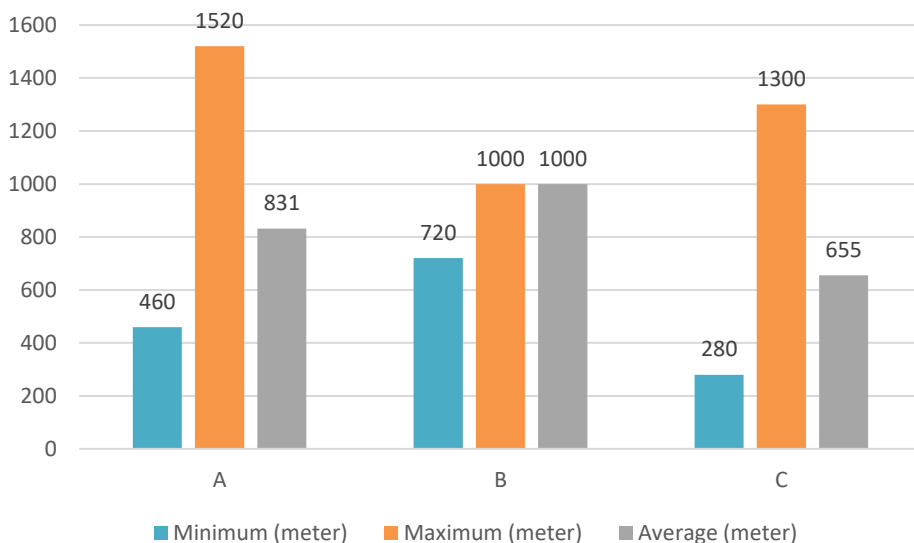


Figure 1. Evaluation of aerobic fitness profile results (*A - dance lessons exclusively; B - dance classes, plus three physical education lessons a week; C - five physical education classes a week*)

Being aware of the results, we examined which NETFIT category each student falls into. We found that 52% of the students who learn dance exclusively were in the Healthy Category, 47% in the Needs Improvement Category, and 7% in the Needs

Improvement Category. On the other hand, those who attended physical education and dance were all placed in the Healthy Category. The study showed that more than a third (39%) of the students who do not attend dance classes were in the Needs Improvement Category, while almost half (47%) could be classified in the Healthy Category. These results prove that the dance program positively influences aerobic endurance.

The abdominal muscle test results

The results of the scheduled abdominal muscle test showed a difference in the performances of each group. In the group attending dance classes only, the maximum number of repetitions was the same as those participating in physical education besides dance (80). However, the maximum performance measured in the third group was only 48 sit-ups, significantly weaker than the other two groups.

We also experienced a difference in the minimum results. The student who performed the weakest (15 repetitions) is a member of the group that attends five physical education classes a week and participates in a dance exercise program. In the dance group, the student who did the fewest sit-ups could do slightly less than half the same number of exercises as the student who did the most. Comparing the performances of the three groups, the results showed a significant difference between the average number of sit-ups performed. There were groups where the students did an average of 66 sit-ups, and there were groups where they did only 35 sit-ups. Examining the average performance, the best performing groups were those who have dance classes at school, the weakest result on the scheduled abdominal muscle test (35 pcs) was the group who do not participate in any form of dance movement at school apart from the five weekly physical education classes (Figure 2).

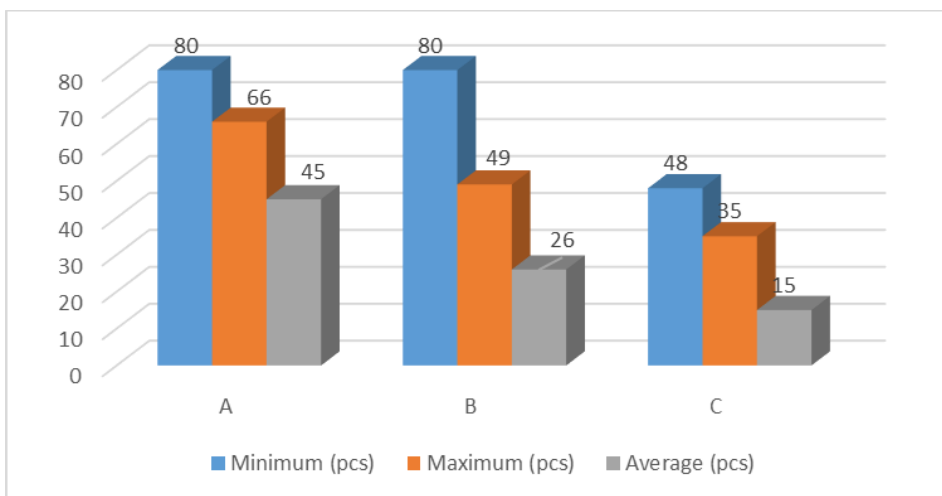


Figure 2. Evaluation of scheduled abdominal muscle test results (A - dance lessons exclusively; B - dance classes plus three physical education classes a week; C - five physical education classes a week)

Based on the classification in the NETFIT zone, it can be concluded that the dance program participants and those who attend physical education and dance are all placed in the Healthy Category. On the other hand, the study showed that 7% of the students who attended only five physical education lessons per week fall into the Needs Improvement Category. Most of these students (93%) were placed in the Healthy Category. Based on the results, we determined that the dance program positively influences the strength and endurance of the abdominal muscles.

The strength of the extensor muscles

The test results showed that the maximum number of torso lifts was the same for all groups (30), but the minimum results marked a difference. The student with the lowest score (14) is a group member who participates in only five physical education lessons per week. The group averages showed that the students in the first two groups, which also focus on dance, could perform 26-27 torso lifts. In contrast, the average for the students attending only physical education classes was slightly less, 22. The diagram clearly shows that students' performance within each group is different. We measured the most significant difference within the group among students who attended only physical education classes (Figure 3).

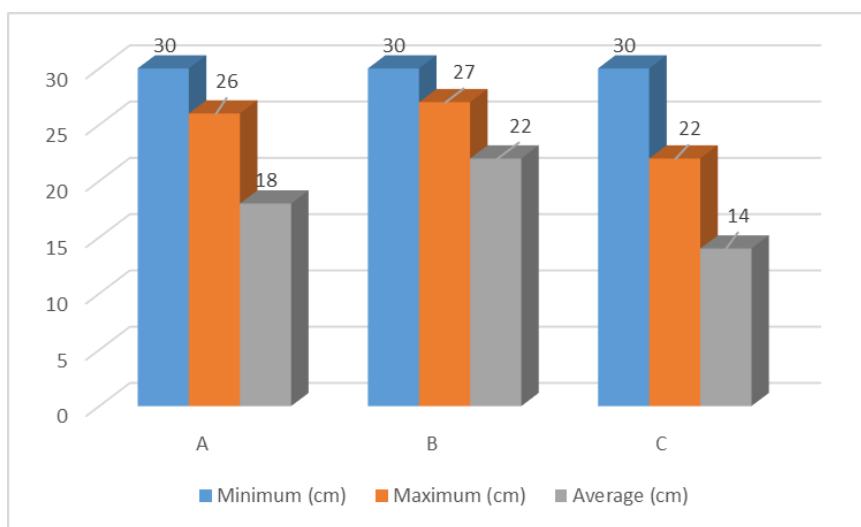


Figure 3. Evaluation of the results of core extensor muscle strength test (*A - dance lessons exclusively; B - dance classes plus three physical education classes a week; C - five physical education classes a week*)

The classification in the NETFIT health zone, based on the test results measuring the strength of the core extensor muscles, showed that 78% of the students attending the dance program were classified in the Healthy Category, and 22% were placed in the Needs Improvement Category. From the group where there are three physical education classes in addition to dance, a significant majority of students (91%) were in the Healthy Category, while the performance of 9% requires improvement. Half the students attending five physical education lessons per week (50%-50%) were placed in the Healthy and Needs Improvement categories.

The results of the upper body muscle strength test

Finally, differences can be found between the studied groups when comparing the results of the scheduled push-up test. The best-performing student was in the group participating only in the dance exercise program; he could perform 48 arm flexions and extensions. All three groups had students who performed poorly on the push-up test. Among the students who attended five physical education classes a week and those who attended physical education classes in addition to dance, there was one who could perform only one push-up. The diagram clearly shows that the results of the scheduled push-up test of all three groups also show differences within the group. The most significant difference between the students' results was in the group of students who had dance classes only since the difference between the best and the weakest performance was 45 arm flexions and extensions. Among the students of the three groups, the performance of the students who attended physical education five times a week was the closest to each other. The students participating in the dance program were able to perform more push-ups on average (18 pcs) than the members of the other two groups (Figure 4).

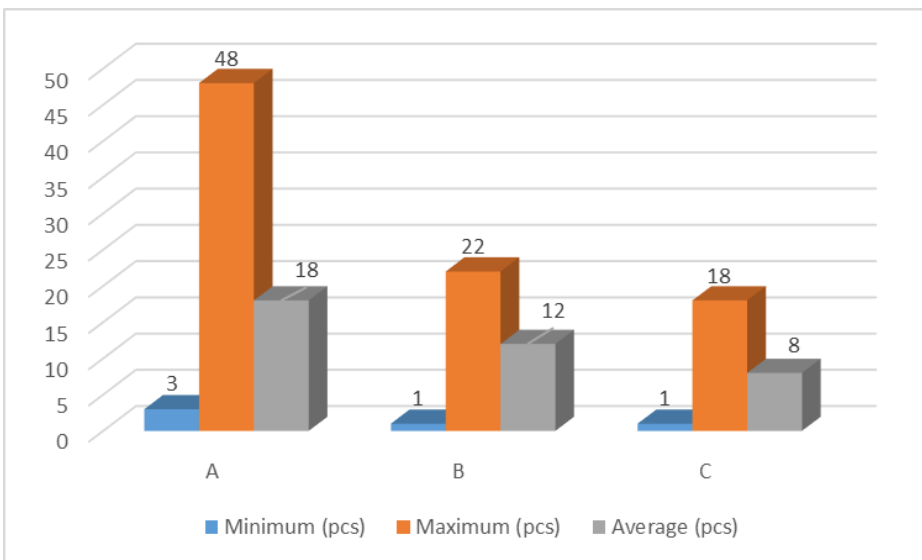


Figure 4. Evaluation of the results of the scheduled push-up test (A - dance classes exclusively; B - dance classes plus three physical education classes a week; C - five physical education classes a week)

According to the results of the push-up test, 93% of the students attending dance classes are classified to the Healthy Category and 7% to the Needs Improvement Category. In addition to dance, the students attending the physical education class performed similarly; 91% fell into the Healthy Category and 9% into the Needs Improvement Category. Of the students attending physical education classes, 64% are categorized as healthy, and 36% need improvement. Based on the results of this test, the dance program positively influences the level of strength and endurance of the upper body

Conclusions

In our research, we aimed to find out whether the aerobic fitness index is better for students who attend dance classes in addition to physical education. Based on the results obtained during the survey, we found that dancing significantly increases aerobic fitness, and students who dance in addition to physical education perform better on the aerobic endurance test.

In the strength-endurance tests, the best results were obtained by students majoring in dance. The results showed that the students who participated in the dance program performed more abdominal exercises on average than those who did not take up dance. The group with only a dance program at the school performed 6% better than the group with dance and physical education and 28% better than the students attending physical education.

Based on the results of the push-up test, it can be concluded that the students studying dance performed 56% better. In comparison, the students attending dance and physical education classes performed 32% better than those attending only physical education classes. The test measuring the strength of the core extensor muscles showed a similar result, as the students who regularly participate in the dance program have significantly higher endurance levels.

We found that many dance program students also do regular sports outside of school. The research results showed that, on average, more than half (56%) of the students participating in the dance program are active in sports outside of school for 6 hours a week. Those who dance choose other sports as a hobby besides folk dancing, which enables them to improve their strength and fitness.

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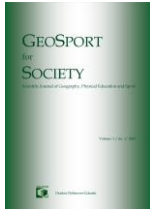
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Enhancing work-life balance through physical and recreational activities

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Abstract: The interplay between professional and personal life significantly impacts individual well-being, making work-life balance an essential topic of study. This research investigates how individuals maintain equilibrium between these domains, with a focus on physical and recreational activities as balancing strategies. Using a qualitative exploratory design, semi-structured interviews with 12 respondents in Bihor, Romania, revealed diverse attitudes, behaviors, and strategies for achieving work-life balance. Participants highlighted the pivotal role of physical activity, mindfulness, and clear boundaries between work and family life. Barriers to balance included limited time, stress, and professional demands, which adversely affect physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, and job performance. Respondents reported using strategies such as outdoor activities, exercise, and mindfulness to mitigate stress, enhance energy, and foster well-being. The findings underscore the necessity of individual and organizational initiatives to support work-life balance, suggesting that physical and recreational activities are not only stress alleviators but also boosters of productivity and quality of life. Future research should expand on the sample size and explore organizational interventions to enrich our understanding of effective work-life balance strategies.

Keywords: work-life balance, physical activity, recreational practices, stress management, well-being

Introduction

Professional and personal life represent two major and interconnected domains in an adult's life (Zhang et al., 2012). Work provides personal fulfillment and serves as a critical social component for building relationships, receiving support, and

achieving professional goals. Simultaneously, individuals establish families, creating another area requiring active engagement, which is family life. In cases where children are present, individuals must also participate in their education and upbringing. Within these domains, through various roles, responsibilities, and commitments in a constantly changing society, individuals must strive to find balance.

The conceptualization of the term "work-family balance" is varied across the literature (Brough et al., 2020) and reflects the integrative perspective of this relationship (Buliga & Turliuc, 2012). The term is defined as the extent to which a person can effectively manage the time, emotions, and behaviors required by both professional tasks and family responsibilities at the same time (Kirchmeyer, 2000; Collins & Shaw, 2003; Greenhaus et al., 2018; Brough et al., 2020). Definitions emphasize the equal distribution of resources across work and personal life (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work-family balance is often associated with the absence of role conflicts or a minimal conflict between work and nonwork roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). As the definitions show, the output generated from this positive balance is the high level of satisfaction felt by individuals engaging in performing their roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Rusu, 2018; Sirgy & Lee, 2018)

Conversely, conflict between personal and professional life is considered a hallmark of modern society, particularly in developed countries characterized by fast-paced lifestyles and heightened work and family pressures. The definition of the term work-family conflict encompasses the mutually incompatible responsibilities and role requirements emerging from both areas of work and family (Mihelič & Tekavčič, 2014). Individuals may struggle to meet stringent and numerous work requirements while allocating sufficient time to family responsibilities. The combined pressures of work and overlapping family role demands can negatively impact individual well-being and interpersonal relationships (Mihelič & Tekavčič, 2014), affect marital and family satisfaction because of poor communication between partners (Wu et al., 2010; Clark & May, 2013), and are negatively associated with life satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2012). Furthermore, higher level of such conflict lowers individuals' organizational commitment (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), and affects behavior within the work setting (Mihelič & Tekavčič, 2014).

Studies have shown that an imbalanced work-life relationship is a stress factor for individuals and leads to poor physical health (Frone, 2000; Lunau et al., 2014). Research has highlighted various effects in individuals experiencing this work-family imbalance, such as increased blood pressure, headaches and fatigue (Frone et al., 1997). Also, individuals tend to become obese because they lack time and energy to exercise (Grzywacz, 2000). Work-family conflict causes also psychological consequences at individual level, such as mood disorder (Frone, 2000), emotional exhaustion (Zhang et al., 2012), or burnout (Blanch & Aluja, 2012). Burnout differs by manifesting as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Best et al., 2005 quoted by Capotescu, 2006).

Lack of balance between work and family determines individuals to feel inadequate or unfulfilled in different life aspects, or with life in general (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Therefore, this imbalance hinders individuals' ability to achieve goals

and feel accomplished in life, and impacts both personal and professional spheres, with effects ranging from physical and mental health to productivity and interpersonal relationships. Thus, achieving work-family balance is essential for overall well-being and a fulfilling life.

Physical and recreational activities – Strategies for ensuring work-family balance

Literature still lacks studies focusing on individual-level strategies for achieving work-life balance and satisfaction. However, recent studies addressed this issue and explains how individuals can achieve both work and family goals by applying four action strategies: allocating resources, changing resources and barriers, sequencing goals, and revising goals (Hirschi & Shockely, 2019). Sometimes, individual strategies for achieving work-family balance are largely related to self-care. The notion of self-care often promoted in the media typically involves indulgent moments, such as enjoying a dessert or a drink, going out, getting a massage, or visiting a beauty salon. However, specialized literature suggests that this popular understanding of self-care is misleading. While such activities can be part of a routine, true self-care should involve a deeper dimension, focusing on introspection. When imbalances are identified in various areas of life, necessary changes must be made to restore balance, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment (Gobin, 2022).

In today's fast-paced society, individuals often neglect their physical well-being, prioritizing other responsibilities and roles over their physical needs. Coupled with increasing consumerism, this leads to worsening physical and mental health (Pemberton, 2016; Papp et al., 2019; Erdely et al., 2020; Giurgiu et al., 2024). Among various ways individuals can manage the dynamics between work and family in order to achieve balance, literature highlights also practice related to maintaining and increasing physical and mental health. Specialists recommend adults should engage in 2.5 to 5 hours of moderate exercise per week to accelerate heart rate (Gobin, 2022). Examples include cycling, swimming, brisk walking, gardening, running, boxing, hiking, and tennis. These activities particularly improve cardiovascular health. Recent studies show that physical activity enhances work-life balance (Bhatti & Alnehabi, 2023), and has positive effects on work ability (Arvidson et al., 2013). Establishing healthy exercise habits is crucial. Researcher has shown that health-related habits typically require 2–5 months to develop, but depends on the individual (Singh et al., 2024). New habits are easier to implement when attached to existing routines. For instance, cycling to work, parking farther from the destination, or replacing coffee meetings with activities like swimming or tennis can integrate physical activity into daily life.

In addition to physical exercise, mental health strategies, such as mindfulness, play a critical role in balancing work and personal life among employees (Michel et al., 2014; Brough et al., 2020; Trombeta et al., 2024). Mindfulness helps regulate attention and calm the mind, reducing the impact of negative experiences and stressors. The nervous system adapts based on individual experiences, a concept known as experience-dependent neuroplasticity (Hanson & Hanson, 2018). To practice mindfulness, individuals should consciously redirect attention to the

present, using routines like walking to work and observing the surroundings, which also aids brain oxygenation. These individual-level practices, combined with a balanced diet and proper hydration, lead to self-control, a sense of mastery over life, and a healthier relationship between professional and personal life.

Moreover, organizations can and must implement policies to enhance employees' work-life balance, because a balanced employee is also a productive one. Both employees and employers can benefit from these practices. Organizational practices may include adjusting breaks and rest periods, avoiding excessively long work hours, facilitating the fulfillment of family responsibilities (International Labour Organization, 2016) and offering non-material benefits that promote physical and mental well-being, such as free gym memberships or psychological counseling. Therefore, among others, organizational leisure benefits can enhance employees' work-life balance (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Strassburger et al., 2023).

Methodology

The study aims to investigate the behaviors, attitudes, and strategies employed by individuals active in the labor market to achieve a balance between personal and professional life. This topic is essential for better understanding the factors influencing employees' physical and mental well-being and for developing effective interventions to promote balance in daily life.

The primary objective of the research is to identify and describe the strategies individuals adopt to balance their professional and personal lives. To this end, the study explores individuals' opinions, behaviors, and attitudes regarding the creation and implementation of strategies for personal balance in both family and professional contexts.

Secondary research objectives are as follows:

Objective 1: Describe the personal and professional situation and the dynamics of the work-family relationship.

Objective 2: Identify and describe the factors influencing work-life balance.

Objective 3: Identify the strategies implemented at the individual level to ensure work-family balance.

Objective 4: Describe the effects of work-family balance strategies on physical and mental well-being.

This exploratory-descriptive study employed a qualitative research strategy, using individual sociological interviews as the primary method of data collection. Qualitative research methods are commonly used in social and human sciences to deeply explore and understand social phenomena, behaviors, experiences, and perspectives. This approach focuses on collecting and analyzing non-numeric data, such as texts, interviews, observations, and visual materials, allowing for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the analyzed subjects (Mărginean, 2004).

The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview guide. In semi-structured interviews, "*only the discussion themes are pre-established and listed in a summary interview guide*" (Krausz & Stegar, 2007, p. 140). The guide was structured around three main thematic dimensions related to work-life balance among employees. These dimensions are crucial for understanding how individuals perceive

and manage work-life balance and the factors influencing it. The three thematic dimensions are:

1. Work-family dynamics and perceptions of work-life balance.
2. Determinants of work-family balance.
3. Strategies for ensuring work-family balance and their effects.

The research universe consists of active individuals in the labor market, specifically those aged 18 to 65 residing in Bihor County, Romania. From this population, 12 participants were randomly selected using the snowball sampling method. This method involves initially selecting a few known individuals, applying the interview guide, and then asking these individuals to identify others who meet the research criteria and are willing to participate (Babbie, 2010).

Data analysis

The research included 12 participants, of whom 8 were females and 4 males. Most respondents came from urban areas, had higher education, were employed in diverse sectors, and ranged in age from 21 to 53. Table 1 provides a detailed socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Profession	Age	Gender	Education	Rural/Urban
R1: Commercial worker	45 years old	female	General school	Urban
R2: Professor	27 years old	female	Master	Urban
R3: Automotive wiring operator	34 years old	female	Highschool, 10 grades	Rural
R4: Socrates coordinator	28 years old	female	Master	Urban
R5: Assistant manager	21 years old	female	Bachelor	Urban
R6: Forestry engineer	31 years old	male	Master	Urban
R7: Radio announcer	27 years old	female	Master	Urban
R8: Forestry engineer	34 years old	male	Master	Urban
R9: Warehouse operator	30 years old	male	Highschool	Urban
R10: Service woman, trams	53 years old	female	Highschool, 10 grades	Urban
R11: Computer programming engineer	29 years old	male	Bachelor	Rural
R12: Sales and logistics department coordinator	32 years old	female	Master	Urban

The data obtained in the research were analyzed narratively, following the thematic dimensions based on which the interview guide was developed. The main results of the research are presented below.

Results

Work-family dynamics and perception of work-life balance

Regarding how individuals view their professional and family situation, as well as personal balance, the responses varied, but it is notable that most respondents could not provide a concrete meaning for the concept of work-family balance or personal balance. From most responses, it emerges that personal balance refers to having clearly defined boundaries between work and personal life.

"As a state or way of life that allows me to achieve a balance between working and having a life outside of work" (warehouse operator).

Respondents were also asked to assess their level of satisfaction with their personal life. The data indicates a variety of perceptions and levels of satisfaction, with different degrees and nuances observed in this regard.

"It could be better, but I can say that I am satisfied with my personal life and the relationship I have with my children" (commercial worker).

"Family life fulfills me" (teacher).

"I am very satisfied in all aspects" (assistant manager).

"If you asked me to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10, I would say somewhere around 8 or 9. I don't know if anyone can say they have a perfect 10 family or personal life. But we strive every day to get as high as possible" (warehouse operator).

"On a scale from 1 to 10, I would say even 10" (logistics coordinator, sales).

The responses reflect, on one hand, a real awareness of the current level of satisfaction with family life, and on the other hand, there is also a desire from respondents to continue contributing to increasing their satisfaction in this regard. Synthesizing the responses, we observe that most respondents have a relatively high level of satisfaction with their personal life/family life.

Regarding respondents' satisfaction with their professional life, a variety of perceptions stand out, reflecting both satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the workplace and in professional life. Various levels of satisfaction related to working conditions and the professional context were identified.

A general trend observed is the expression of moderate satisfaction or a desire for improvement in professional life. Some respondents expressed strong dissatisfaction with the professional context. Certain respondents mentioned frustrations related to the high workload and constant pressure felt in the work environment. One respondent states that they are not at all satisfied at work due to "too many tasks, short breaks, and too low of a salary" (auto wiring operator), highlighting the perceived discrepancy between effort expended and financial reward.

Additionally, one respondent provides a perspective on the impact of the economic and professional context on personal satisfaction:

"I was affected by the wave of layoffs in the IT sector. Because the market is such that no hiring is taking place, I had to temporarily change fields and accept a lower salary in a field completely different from what I was used to" (warehouse operator).

However, there were also responses that highlighted positive aspects of the work environment, with a higher level of professional satisfaction being noted. For example, one respondent mentions that they are "*satisfied with the workplace, although sometimes it can be very exhausting*" (teacher). This suggests that, despite challenges, respondents recognize and emphasize the benefits present at the workplace, indicating a high level of satisfaction related to the professional environment.

Determinants of work-family balance

The responses from the participants reflect that it is difficult to admit there are issues in managing professional stress and that family life suffers as a result. A small number of respondents, four people, stated that work-related issues do not affect how

they perform their household and family duties, but the majority declared that workplace problems negatively influence their family life. These primarily manifest as tensions in the family, high levels of nervousness and irritability, as well as fatigue, which hinder the completion of household tasks.

"Yes, well, if I have to finish a project or there is pressure from my employer, these things end up affecting my family life and I become more stressed and snap much more easily" (radio announcer).

Regarding the interference of family problems in carrying out work tasks, the responses were equally split; half of the respondents said that family issues do not influence how they perform their tasks at work, while the other six respondents stated that family problems interfere with how they carry out their professional activities.

Synthesizing the responses, it became clear that the relationship with the partner and, in cases where couples have children, with the children is essential for personal balance. The responses reflected that personal balance, support, and understanding from the partner, as well as a lack of conflict, determine the adequate completion of tasks at work. Additionally, the research data highlighted the importance of relationships with friends, which positively influence personal balance and contribute to reducing stress and improving mood. Furthermore, advice and support from friends can provide the confidence needed to overcome professional challenges.

In contrast, the perception of relationships with colleagues at work is varied. While some respondents report positive relationships with colleagues that contribute to a pleasant and cooperative work environment, others describe negative experiences, mentioning stress caused by perceived inequalities at work and interpersonal conflicts. These strained relationships with colleagues can undermine the desired balance between professional and personal life. An interesting aspect is how respondents manage relationships that do not positively contribute to their personal balance: many choose to end relationships that could be detrimental to their balance, emphasizing the importance of selectivity in maintaining mental and emotional health.

One of the factors that significantly influence work-family balance and the management of these two important life domains is time. The lack of time emerged as a major difficulty, negatively affecting family relationships and the respondents' ability to handle personal and professional tasks. The analysis of the responses indicates that respondents desire more free time for personal activities, but without indicating major difficulties in this regard in their current situation.

On the other hand, both physical and mental fatigue, directly related to accumulated stress at work, is another significant barrier. The heavy workload and deadlines contribute to increased stress levels and hinder relaxation. Specific work-related issues, such as frequent travel and communication difficulties within the family, also influence maintaining the balance between professional and personal life.

The analysis of the data shows that the main difficulties in maintaining work-family balance are related to insufficient time, accumulated fatigue, and professional

stress. These factors highlight the need for effective time and stress management strategies to improve the balance between professional and personal life.

Strategies implemented for ensuring work-family balance

Respondents were asked to describe the methods they use to ensure and maintain a balance between work and personal life. The most common methods adopted by the subjects for maintaining work-family balance were: "nature walks," "prayer," "music," "vacations," and "exercise," reflecting the importance of physical and recreational activities in managing the stress that may arise from the imbalance between professional and personal life.

A considerable number of respondents (8) emphasized the importance of physical activities and time spent outdoors. Nature outings, walks, physical exercises, and recreational activities are considered essential for reducing stress and recharging. Spiritual practices are other frequently mentioned methods for maintaining balance. Respondents view prayer as an effective way to find inner peace and calm down. Additionally, music is a popular method for creating a sense of well-being and relaxing. Listening to music is described as an activity that gives respondents a good feeling, indicating the positive impact of music on their mood.

These responses reflect a variety of strategies for maintaining work-life balance, ranging from physical and recreational activities to spiritual practices and a clear separation of the two life domains. Adopting these methods is driven by the need to reduce stress and increase individual well-being both physically and mentally, highlighting the diversity of individual approaches to managing the balance between professional and personal life.

Going deeper, we sought to analyze how these strategies influence respondents' personal lives and professional performance. Several recurring themes and ideas can be observed. Many respondents emphasize that the methods they use give them more energy, increase their motivation to work, and create an overall sense of well-being. This energy gained through the above-mentioned methods and strategies contributes to better workplace performance, eliminating apathy and increasing productivity.

Respondents claim that physical and recreational activities, such as sports, walks in nature, playing with children, and listening to music, have a positive effect on their well-being and professional performance. These activities not only offer relaxation but also stimulate positive thinking, a relaxed mindset, and a higher energy level, thereby facilitating the completion of work tasks.

"They helped me have a positive, relaxed mindset, and then, if I have this state, I can more easily accomplish my tasks at work" (Socrates coordinator).

The research data indicates clear positive effects of the practices and strategies implemented, highlighting various individual benefits achieved through the separation of professional life from personal life and engaging in recreational activities. The practice of these strategies is reflected in the respondents' improved personal relationships. The majority of respondents emphasize the positive impact of work-family balance on their physical health and overall well-being. Terms like "positive" and "better" are frequently used to describe the beneficial effects, increased energy, and overall well-being.

However, two respondents highlighted specific health issues that make it difficult for them to maintain a balance between professional and personal life. One respondent describes a "*fragile health condition*" (forestry engineer) that complicates the process of balancing work with family life and maintaining personal balance. Due to the demanding nature of the work, physical wear and tear have occurred, with the respondent mentioning knee problems that require surgery. Another respondent stated that, due to not maintaining a balance between work and personal life, they faced health issues but now try to prioritize their health and ensure a healthier dynamic between professional and family life.

Discussions and conclusions

The imbalance between professional and personal life can have a strongly negative impact on an individual's physical and mental health. In this regard, the results of our research are consistent with other studies that detail the effects of the lack of such balance, especially when maintained for a longer period, on individual health and well-being (Frone, 2000; Lunau et al., 2014; Mihelič & Tekavčič, 2014). The study highlighted that challenges generated by professional stress can disrupt personal balance, emphasizing the need for effective stress management strategies. There is always room for improvement, even if certain aspects of professional life may interfere with personal life, or vice versa, situations that may affect the maintenance of the work-life balance. Therefore, the strategies that individuals adopt are essential.

The strategies for ensuring and maintaining a balance between work and personal life, identified through the study, reflect the diversity of individual needs and preferences. Physical and recreational activities, such as nature walks and exercise, are considered crucial for reducing stress and restoring physical and mental energy. An active lifestyle is highlighted as an essential element in maintaining work-family balance in the literature (Bhatti & Alnehabi, 2023). Additionally, spiritual and mindfulness practices and music are effective in creating a sense of well-being at an individual level (Trombeta et al., 2024). Therefore, the diversity of strategies used contributes significantly to individual well-being. Moreover, consistency in applying these strategies is crucial for maintaining these positive effects, while deviations may temporarily affect the quality of personal life. Furthermore, the clear separation between personal and professional life is seen as an essential practice for maintaining work-family balance. The benefits observed from implementing these strategies at an individual level include improved interpersonal relationships, a general sense of calm, lower stress levels, and improved workplace performance. Maintaining the balance between professional and personal life is a complex challenge, often involving sacrifices and considerable efforts from individuals. The fatigue associated with managing this balance is often inevitable, but ensuring the balance is essential for maintaining health and harmony in both spheres of life. An active lifestyle can significantly contribute to ensuring work-family balance, which has long-term beneficial effects and enhances general individual well-being. Therefore, frequent engagement in physical and recreational activities can be an appropriate strategy for each individual's personal balance.

Interviewing a larger number of respondents, and selecting respondents only

from Bihor County, are some of the limitations of this study. However, these current limitations can serve as starting points for future research directions. Among these, a quantitative approach to this topic could bring new data and results that could contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon studied. Another research direction could be the analysis of the effectiveness of work-family balance strategies adopted at the organizational level. In an organizational context, investigating the effects of stimulating employees by offering more opportunities to be involved in physical and recreational activities on their work-family dynamics could be a relevant research objective.

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GEOSPORT FOR SOCIETY

Volume 21, no. 2/2024 pp. 72-157

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