



Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism

Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning

Journal homepage: <http://jssp.reviste.ubbcluj.ro>



The Relation between Physical Activity and Rural Space Concerning 13-18 Year-Old Romanian Youth

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Keywords: *environment, physical effort, sedentary behaviours, physical activity, rural space*

ABSTRACT

Scarce data on physically active and sedentary youth behaviour in the Transylvanian rural space are available. Romania is a relatively new member of the EU; however the socio-economic status (SES) of the people in this country may differ from other countries. The main differences, not only the geographical ones, between the rural and the urban space could also specifically influence the population's health and quality of life, in our case the youths' between 13 and 18 years old.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the fast technological and societal changes, opportunities to adopt convenient and attractive sedentary behaviours as part of a contemporary lifestyle are likely to have increased.

The physical activity, physical fitness and health in young people as part of a contemporary lifestyle, are likely to have increased, although the relationship between physical activity and different sedentary behaviours may be complex (Marshall, Biddle, Sallis, McKenzie, & Conway, 2002).

Childhood obesity is steadily rising in the industrialised world and the low levels of physical activity are likely to be a primary cause.

Romania is a country with two different constitutive elements: urban and rural areas. The lifestyle in those two geographical areas is particularly significant.

As a way of life, the Romanian rural space is different from the urban one [10].

The statistics show us that 90 % of the Romanian territory is administratively controlled by rural settlements.

The physical frame of the rural settlements plays an important role in the active lifestyle processes of the population.

Moreover, Romania emerging from a collectivist political system and now joining the market economies of the European Union may have physical activity and sedentary behaviours that are related to socio-economic conditions from rural or urban areas.

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The main differences, not only the geographical ones, between the rural and the urban space could also specifically influence the population's health and quality of life, in our case the youth between 13 and 18 years old.

It was hypothesized that there would be differences in the physical activity of young people from rural and urban areas and that boys would be physically more active and indulge in more technological sedentary behaviours than girls.

We hypothesized that the physical activity in rural areas would be associated with the influence of the environmental rural factors.

The young people have a "natural tendency" to lead a much more active lifestyle than others. They do not need a special effort to do it.

Their physical effort capacity can be improved without special training, gained only under the influence of the conditions of a specific lifestyle from a specific environment.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Secondary school students (n 623; 247 males and 376 females; average age 13 - 18 years old) were assessed on 3 weekdays and one weekend day in eight Transylvanian counties (Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Mureș, Sălaj and Sibiu). The participants were randomly selected students from convenience sampled state secondary schools. Neither special PE classes nor special sport school students (attending certain schools for their sports ability) were involved in the study. The instruments consist in an Ecological Momentary Assessment Diary

The principal data collection instrument was a paper-and-pencil "free time diary" that students filled in outside the school hours.

The diary was divided into two parts, and both student and parent/carer consent forms were included.

The first part comprised questions about child-level variables (9 items; "About You"), family-level variables (11 items; "About your Family"), and environmental-level variables (15 items; "About your Home").

The second part of the diary was for recording behaviours, locations, and social contexts that young people engage in each day. We used SPSS for Windows V14.0 for data handling and analyses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As weekday behaviours are concerned, the young people have high physical activity levels.

Physical activity (PA) includes sport activities and exercises, organised and non-organised games as well as active travel programmes (walking/cycling).

As weekend behaviours are concerned, the young people have a low technology-based sedentary behaviour. The low levels of the Technology-based sedentary behaviours of Romanian rural areas children may reflect the reduced access that they have to such forms of entertainment compared to urban areas young people.

The scattered settlements require longer time for reaching the controlled facilities. There are villages in the mountain areas where the children spend over two hours for getting to their schools.

The difference of level (altitude) between low places, where the main facilities are concentrated, and high places, situated at peripheral areas, frequently exceeds 600 metres. By walking, they get a good physical body strengthening and toning.

Our study confirms the hypothesis that regards the favourable characteristics of the rural environment for the sports performance (just in the interrelation with growth and development of the human individual, which possesses the necessary bio-psycho-motor qualities).

The differences between rural and urban areas are reflected in the group's behaviour, in nutrition, in life's psychology and philosophy.

We can establish a major typology of the activities in concordance with the orographic stages at the national level.

Even the European countries report quite high levels of sedentary behaviours and also the same in Romania in urban spaces, the Romanian rural young people are still physically active due to the specificity of their living conditions.

The representative geographical rural areas, where the autarchic farmsteads are predominant and where the main occupation is agriculture, are "beneficial" for people. They can be defined as bio-psycho-motor models, capable of encouraging and sustaining an active lifestyle.

The percentage of the sport performers born in the Romania's rural areas is much more significant than that of those coming from the urban areas. The sport performers coming from the rural spaces have better motor skills, and the rural space offers models of somatic development fit for practising certain sports.

Knowing all the constitutive elements that define the geographical rural area, and implicitly all the relief features in which they are situated, is an indispensable condition for a scientific assessment of the Romanian specific sport selective process for the various sport fields.

The remarkable results obtained by the sportsmen coming from the rural areas confirms our statement that the living in rural space is a factor that determines the sport performance.

4. CONCLUSION

Even the European Union countries report quite high levels of sedentary behaviours and also the same is valid in Romanian urban spaces; the Romanian rural young people are still physically active due to the specificity of their living conditions. The percentage of the sport performers born in the Romanian rural areas is much more significant than that of those originating

from the urban areas. The sport performers coming from the rural spaces have better motor skills, and the rural area offers somatic models fit for practising certain sports.

Getting to know all the constitutive elements that define the geographical rural area, and implicitly all the relief features in which they are situated, is an indispensable condition for a scientific assessment of the Romanian specific sport selective process for the various sport fields.

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