

Motives for performing recreational sports activities of pupils in the alpine regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze the motives of pupils from the alpine regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland for the performance of recreational sports activity considering gender and the size of the town. The research was conducted among 1,190 18-year-old pupils ($M=18.54\pm 0.32$ years). These were 299 boys and 300 girls from large towns and 291 boys and 300 girls from small towns. The applied research tool was the German version of the questionnaire for measuring sport motivation. The most important motives for recreational sports activity of all pupils are health, social and ascetic motives. The boys prefer asceticism and risks, the girls prefer aesthetics and health. The social motive is significantly less important for the Swiss youth compared to the other nations. German girls prefer asceticism more than Austrian and Swiss girls. The motives for recreational sports activity are of similar importance to the pupils from large and small towns of all three nations.

Key Words: sports motives, youth, alpine regions, Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

Introduction

Sports activity belongs to the most important forms of leisure activity among young people. It is a multi-layer concept, and should be considered within the following aspects:

- role and place of sport among other leisure behavioral patterns,
- place where sport is practiced,
- motives for sports activities,
- frequency of practicing sport,
- disciplines of recreational sports,
- social aspect (practicing sport unaccompanied or accompanied),
- sport facilities available near the place of residence.

Why do we engage in sports activities? The analysis of human motivation provides us with answers. Human actions are a reflection of subjective perceptions, characterized by a sense of rationality and awareness-raising processes (Gabler, 2000, 2002). Every human action is driven by either one or multiple reasons, which also includes the decision to do sports (Eberspächer, 1982; Atkinson et al., 2001; Schüler et al., 2008)). According to Weiner (1986), Austin and Vancouver (1996), as well as Ingledew et al. (2009) and Sudeck and Conzelmann (2011), it is not only motives but also goals that form the basis of sports activity among young people. Motives and goals are the subjective reasons for the sports activity. They give answers as to which results, effects and consequences should be achieved and which states of mind should be experienced during the sports activity and after it as well (Wienke and Jekauc, 2016). Gabler (2002) claims that behavior in sports is often determined by different motives for performing sports activities and not just one. Alfermann (1995) stresses an important role of gender differences concerning the motives for sports activity such as more understanding for aesthetics and social interactions by girls. Opaschowski (2008) defines primary motives for sports activity such as health, fun, fitness, compensation for lack of movement and degradation of stress. According to him, secondary motives are subdivided into psychological motivation (feeling good, experiences of success and asceticism, strengthening of self-confidence, pastime), physical motivation (conditioning, aesthetics, physical challenge, body-experiences) and social motivation (gregariousness, group experiences, meeting friends).

Several surveys conducted in the German-speaking area describe fun as the crucial motive for performing recreational sport. However, fun may be connected with other motives such as physical fitness, health, pleasure of movement, compensation for daily life and gregariousness (Bräutigam, 1994; Bock, 2014).

While in Germany and Switzerland, those who commit to leisure sports mostly value health and fun, Austrians consider physical fitness the most relevant factor. Grasping the motivation for sports activity is a central part in the field of sports science. In order to measure individual motives for actively engaging in sports, Steffgen et al. (2000) developed a special kind of questionnaire. It is based on six major motives:

- Social (doing sports with other people)
- Health and fitness
- Risk
- Aesthetic (enjoying beautiful and elegant movements/motions)
- Catharsis (relaxation)
- Ascetic (effort or overcoming)

Sports science has frequently scrutinized the motivation for sports activity in individual countries, yet there is only little research dealing with comparative analyses focusing on entire regions. It also includes studies concerning the motives for sports activity of school youth of full age with consideration to gender and the size of hometown. The aim of this research was, therefore, to analyze the motives of pupils from the alpine regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland for the performance of recreational sports activities considering gender and size of their place of residence.

Material & methods

Participants

Altogether, 1,190 persons, at the completed age of 18 ($M=18.54\pm 0.32$ years) from the alpine regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland participated in the research. In Germany, 387 pupils ($M=18.48\pm 0.31$ years) from technical colleges and high schools were asked to participate, and 91 boys and 97 girls from a large town were included (more than 1 million inhabitants), as well as 93 boys and 106 girls from a small town (less than 15,000 inhabitants). In Austria, 391 high school pupils ($M=18.53\pm 0.42$ years) took part in the survey, 96 boys and 103 girls were from a large city (more than 140,000 inhabitants) and 94 boys and 98 girls came from a small town (approximately 7,000 inhabitants). In Switzerland, there was a total of 412 participants from high schools ($M=18.60\pm 0.24$ years), which included 112 boys and 100 girls from a big town (more than 100,000 inhabitants) and 104 boys and 96 girls from a small town (15,000 inhabitants). All interviewed pupils declared to be regularly active in sports in their leisure time (at least once/twice per week).

Research methods

The applied research tool was the original German version of the standardized questionnaire for measuring sport motivation (Steffgen et al., 2000). This research model contains six relevant dimensions of sports activity and is used as a tool for measuring six different sport motives: Aesthetic, Health, Relaxation, Ascetic, Social and Risk. The items for each motive explain their meaning, and they are also questions in the questionnaire:

Aesthetic – I like to do sports which express the elegance of human movement or rather offer the opportunity to experience the beauty of movement.

Health – I think it is necessary to do sports often to keep my body in shape and maintain my health.

Relaxation – Doing sports on a regular basis offers the best opportunity to relax the body and mind or rather to let off steam after every-day exertion.

Ascetic – I like to do sports for competitions, to achieve a lot in sports and to compete with others.

Social – I mainly do sports with friends and I believe that sports help to make new acquaintances.

Risk – I prefer sports during in which you have to risk a lot and which offer an exciting feeling of danger.

There were two possible ways to answer (“is the case” and “is not the case”). Participants could tick more than one answer.

Statistical analysis

All the research results were statistically documented. When comparing the nations, gender and size of town (big city, small city) the Chi-Square test was applied in order to determine significant differences (Cohen, 1998). The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Furthermore, to describe the association between variables as the effect size (ES), Cramer’s V (φ_c) formula was used. This test defines the strength of a relationship between variables (Sheskin, 1997), and it was computed and interpreted according to conventions for describing the size of the associations between them (Rea and Parker, 2014). These are:

0.00 - 0.10 – negligible association

0.10 - 0.20 – weak association

0.20 - 0.40 – moderate association

0.40 - 0.60 – relatively strong association

0.60 - 0.80 – strong association

0.80 – 1.00 – very strong association.

Results

Motives for performing sports of all the participants

The most important motives for determining the practice of recreational sports among all pupils are the following: health, social - understood as the wish and possibility to practice sport together and establish contacts, as well as ascetic (Table 1). Boys attach more importance to ascetic motives ($\chi^2=191.36$, $p<0.001$, with moderate strength of the relationship between gender and this motive, $\phi_c=0.40$) and risk ($\chi^2=440.77$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.60$). Girls prefer aesthetics (big towns: $\chi^2=163.16$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.52$; small towns: $\chi^2=170.61$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.54$) and health (big towns: $\chi^2=8.31$, $p=0.003$, with a weak association of $\phi_c=0.11$; small towns: $\chi^2=14.37$, $p<0.001$, with a weak association of $\phi_c=0.15$). Relaxation is an important motive for more than two thirds of the participants. Significant differences were only found between boys (74.1%) and girls (64.6%) in big towns ($\chi^2=6.03$, $p=0.014$). Cramer's Phi value=0.10 shows only a negligible association between gender and the choice of the relaxation motive.

Table 1 The young participants' motives for performing recreational sports in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (percentage)

Motive	Boys big town n=299	Boys small town n=291	Boys total n=590	Girls big town n=300	Girls small town n=300	Girls total n=600	Big town n=599	Small town n=591	Total n=1190
Aesthetic	33.4	32.9	33.2	85.3	86	85.6	59.4	59.5	59.5
Health	64.6	61	62.8	76	79	77.5	70.3	70	70.1
Relaxation	74.1	70.1	72.1	64.6	63.3	63.9	69.3	66.7	68
Ascetic	86.9	87.5	87.2	50.1	49.2	49.6	68.5	68.3	68.4
Social	67.6	70.2	68.9	69.6	68.2	68.9	68.6	69.2	68.9
Risk	86.4	86.7	86.5	26.2	25.2	25.7	56.3	55.9	56.1

Looking at the young people's residence situations (big town, small town), no significant differences regarding the motives for sports performance were determined.

Motives for sports activities of the pupils from Germany

The most important motive for performing recreational sports for young Germans (especially for girls) is health (Table 2). Significant differences can only be found between boys and girls from the small town ($\chi^2=4.01$, $p=0.045$). Cramer's Phi value=0.15 confirms only a negligible association between gender and the choice of the health motive. For girls, aesthetics is extremely important when doing sports. The Chi-Square test showed very significant differences between girls and boys from the big town ($\chi^2=55.56$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.54$) and from the small town ($\chi^2=59.91$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.55$). Both values of Cramer's Phi coefficient show a relatively strong association between gender and the aesthetic motive. Among the boys, the motive of risk dominates in the big town ($\chi^2=56.94$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.55$) as well as the small town ($\chi^2=59.65$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.54$). Both values of Cramer's Phi also show a relatively strong association between gender and the risk motive. Even more significant differences between boys and girls can be determined when considering ascetic as a motive (big town: $\chi^2=15.54$, $p<0.001$, with a moderate association of $\phi_c=0.28$; small town: $\chi^2=11.50$, $p<0.001$, with a moderate association of $\phi_c=0.24$).

Table 2 Motives for performing sports activities of the pupils from Germany (percentage)

Motive	Boys big town n=91	Boys small town n=93	Boys total n=184	Girls big town n=97	Girls small town n=106	Girls total n=203	Big town n=188	Small town n=199	Total n=387
Aesthetic	28.6	31.2	29.9	83.5	85.8	84.7	56.9	60.3	58.5
Health	68.1	64.5	66.3	78.3	77.4	77.8	73.4	71.4	72.4
Relaxation	73.6	68.8	71.2	68	65.1	66.5	70.7	66.8	68.7
Ascetic	85.7	84.9	85.3	58.8	62.3	60.6	71.8	72.9	72.4
Social	73.6	71	72.3	68	69.8	68.9	70.7	70.3	70.5
Risk	84.6	81.7	83.2	28.9	27.4	28.1	55.9	52.7	54.3

Looking at the young people's residence situations in Germany, no significant differences regarding the motives for sports performance were determined.

Motives for sports activities of the pupils from Austria

The social motive and health motives are the most important for the pupils from Austria (Table 3). Girls prefer health as a motive for doing recreational sports activities more frequently than boys, but significant differences can only be determined among pupils from the big town ($\chi^2=4.09$, $p=0.04$). Cramer's $\Phi=0.14$, shows only a weak association between gender and this motive. For the boys, ascetic and risk are the main motives, whereas girls chose aesthetics. Among the genders highly significant differences were found regarding the motives ascetic, risk and aesthetic, in the big town as well as the small town.

- Ascetic: big town ($\chi^2=36.08$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.42$); small town ($\chi^2=33.25$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.41$). Both values of Cramer's Φ confirm the relatively strong association between gender and the ascetic motive.
- Risk: big town ($\chi^2=71.93$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.60$); small town ($\chi^2=71.61$, $p<0.001$, with a strong association of $\phi_c=0.61$)
- Aesthetic: big town ($\chi^2=60.98$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.55$); small town ($\chi^2=49.16$, $p<0.001$, also with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.50$).

Table 3 Motives for performing sports activities of the pupils from Austria (percentage)

Motive	Boys big town n=96	Boys small town n=94	Boys total n=190	Girls big town n=103	Girls small town n=98	Girls total n=201	Big town n=199	Small town n=192	Total n=391
Aesthetic	32.3	34	33.2	87.4	84.7	86.1	60.8	59.9	60.4
Health	61.5	61.7	61.6	76.7	74.5	75.1	68.8	68.2	68.5
Relaxation	71.9	72.3	72.1	67	63.3	65.2	69.3	67.7	68.5
Ascetic	88.5	87.2	87.9	47.6	47	47.3	67.3	66.7	67
Social	67.7	72.3	70	73.8	73.5	73.6	70.1	72.9	71.5
Risk	84.4	87.2	85.8	23.3	25.5	24.4	52.8	55.7	54.2

Looking at the young people's residence situations in Austria, no significant differences regarding the motives for sports performance were determined.

Motives for sports activities of the pupils from Switzerland

As can be seen in Table 4, health as the most important sport performance motive is more preferred by girls from the small town ($\chi^2=6.59$, $p<0.010$, with a weak association of $\phi_c=0.18$). The ascetic motive dominates among boys both in the big town ($\chi^2=47.17$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.47$) and the small town ($\chi^2=57.10$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.53$). According to both values of Cramer's Φ coefficient, there is a relatively strong association between gender and the ascetic motive. Even bigger differences between boys and girls can be found regarding the motive of risk (big town: $\chi^2=80.06$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.61$; small town: $\chi^2=93.49$, $p<0.001$, $\phi_c=0.68$). Cramer's statistics confirm a strong association between these variables. Girls attach great importance to aesthetics which are significantly less important to boys. The Chi-Square test determined highly significant differences as well, both in the big town ($\chi^2=44.44$, $p<0.001$, with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.45$) and small town ($\chi^2=57.85$, $p<0.001$, also with a relatively strong association of $\phi_c=0.53$). Furthermore, boys from the small town prefer relaxation more frequently than girls ($\chi^2=6.93$, $p<0.009$), however, the strength of the relationship between these variables is weak ($\phi_c=0.18$).

Table 4 Motives for performing sports activities of the pupils from Switzerland (percentage)

Motive	Boys big town n=112	Boys small town n=104	Boys total n=216	Girls big town n=100	Girls small town n=96	Girls total n=196	Big town n=212	Small town n=200	Total n=412
Aesthetic	39.3	33.7	36.5	85	87.5	86.2	62.1	60.6	61.3
Health	54.3	56.7	60.5	73	75	74	68.4	65.9	67.2
Relaxation	76.8	69.2	73	59	61.5	60.3	68.4	65.9	67.2
Ascetic	86.6	90.4	88.5	44	38.5	41.3	65.3	65.9	65.6
Social	61.6	67.3	64.4	67	61.5	64.3	64.3	64.4	64.4
Risk	88.4	91.3	89.8	27	22.9	25	57.7	57.1	57.4

Looking at the young people's residence situations, no significant differences were determined, equal to the other nations.

Three-Nation Comparison

The survey of the pupils from all three nations (Figure 1 and Tables 2, 3 and 4) showed significant differences regarding the social motive ($\chi^2=6.11$, $p=0.047$), however, according to $\phi_c=0.07$, there is a negligible association between these variables. This motive is less important for Swiss pupils (highest participation in the Chi-Square Value=3.89) than for the pupils from Germany and Austria. Regarding all other motives, the Chi-Square test did not demonstrate any significant differences. This means that these motives are of similar importance for all participants.

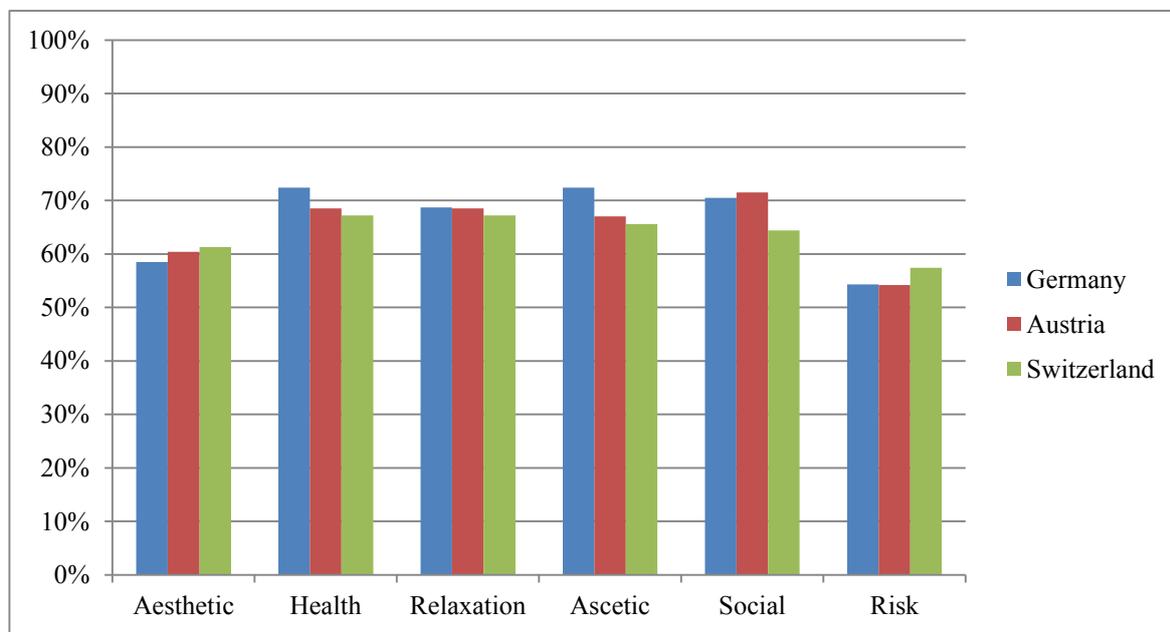


Fig. 1 Three-Nation Comparison of the pupils' motives for performing sports activities

The survey of the girls from all three nations showed significant differences regarding the ascetic motive ($\chi^2=15.60$, $p=0.0004$). The German girls (highest participation in the Chi-Square Value=9.39) are motivated much more by ascetic motives than the girls from Austria or Switzerland (Tables 2, 3 and 4), although, Cramer's statistics ($\phi_c=0.16$) show only a weak association among the girls from the three nations. Regarding all other motives, the Chi-Square test did not show any significant differences. When comparing the three nations regarding size of the hometown, no statistically significant differences were determined. Therefore, it can be claimed that the pupils from all three nations – no matter whether they come from a big town or small town – are similarly motivated to do sports.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine motives for performing recreational sports activities by young people from the alpine regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The results show that the most important motive for all participants is health (70.1%), but for girls (77.5%) it is significantly more important than for boys (62.8%). For all participants, regardless of gender, the social motive seems to be important (68.9%). The ascetic motive ranks third but is much more important for boys (87.2%) than girls (49.6%). When doing sports, boys prefer risk significantly more than girls, whereas aesthetics seems to be of much greater meaning for girls. Looking at the results of all the participants, it becomes obvious that the size of their hometown does not influence the choice of motive.

According to Daley (2002), male pupils from schools in England and Wales are significantly more motivated to practice sports and demonstrate greater involvement in physical activity than female pupils. Hagger et al. (2002) and Milne et al. (2002) stress that the health-related aspect is the most important motive for sports activity among young people.

For the German pupils, regardless of gender, health, ascetic and social aspects were the most important. Among boys, risk and social aspects dominated. Similar to the boys, girls, too, appreciate the gregariousness of sports activities, but also aesthetics and health. Similar results were found by Baur and Burrmann (2000). They discovered that for the questioned girls, wellness, relaxation and a nice body as a result from doing sports – this was also stressed by Haut and Emrich (2011) and Sudeck and Conzelmann (2011) - were important. However, for the participating boys, asceticism, competition and excitement were significant. According to the research by Baur and Burrmann (2000), Baur et al. (2002), and Brettschneider and Bräutigam (1990), sports is mostly about having fun and fitness for both genders. Through surveys, Opaschowski (2008) realized that for participants,

health, fun, compensation for lack of exercise, being in shape and reduction of stress were most important. Steffgen and Schwenkmezger (1995) questioned young people from Germany and Luxembourg and came to the conclusion that for them, the social and health aspects are very significant, but also relaxation, risk and aesthetics. According to Oppen (1996), boys compete in school sports competitions more often than girls, which means that they appreciate the risk motive more.

For the young participants from Austria, the social, health, relaxation and ascetic aspects are most important. For boys, asceticism and risk are by far the most important motives, for girls it is aesthetics. In 1970, Größing already learned that fun, health and fitness are some of the most important motives for sports performance among young people in Austria. In online-questionnaires in 2008, most participants chose fitness and health as the motive for doing sports, just about 60% chose the social motive. Bässler (1994) and Weiß et al. (1999) discovered that girls mostly do sports to achieve a nice body, whereas boys were interested in sports competition performance.

For young people in Switzerland, health, relaxation and asceticism are the most important motives. Similar to the boys in Germany and Austria, the risk and ascetic motives dominate among Swiss boys, whereas aesthetics and health dominate among girls. The same results were found by Lamprecht, Fischer and Stamm (2008). They confirm that for young people from Switzerland aged 15-19, the motives of fun (73%), gregariousness (52%), health (43%), leisure (43%), as well as ascetic (31%) and relaxation (23%) are very important. They stress that for boys, the social, ascetic (fitness) and competition aspects are more important than for girls. Furthermore, Lamprecht, Fischer and Stamm (2015) claim that health and fun are very important for young people in Switzerland. Egger (1991) emphasizes health as an important motive, as well as fitness oriented and aesthetic aspects.

In comparing the three nations, it can be said that the social motive is significantly less important for young pupils in Switzerland than for the participants of the other nations. Additionally, the ascetic motive for performing recreational sports activities is much more important for German girls than for the others. When comparing big and small towns of the three nations, no statistically significant differences regarding the choice of sports motives could be determined. The limitations of this study can be seen in the use of the survey method. Using the observation method would be more effective but is hardly possible to perform because of the sample size (1,190 persons). New studies in the field of sports activity could consider other regions and countries as well as the younger age categories of pupils.

Conclusions

1. The most important motive for performing recreational sports activities for 18-year-old pupils is health.
2. Risk and ascetic motives are the most typical for boys, and for girls, aesthetic and health motives.
3. German and Austrian pupils prefer the social motive considerably more than Swiss pupils.
4. The size of the hometown of the tested persons does not differentiate the choice of motives for their sports activity.

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