

Effects of outdoor education on traveling habits of adults in Slovakia and Hungary

BEATA DOBAY¹, MIKLÓS BÁNHIDI², JAROMÍR ŠIMONEK³

¹Department of Physical Education and Sport, J. Selye University in Komárno, SLOVAKIA

²Health and Sport Science Faculty, Istvan Szechenyi University, Győr, HUNGARY

³Department of Physical Education and Sport, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, SLOVAKIA

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Abstract:

The purpose of the research is to present results of an international study are presented regarding the traveling habits of adults who participated in outdoor education programs during their childhood.

Materials and methods: in the survey, 2965 Slovak and 2404 Hungarian adults were studied to determine if there is any correlation between school experience and travel behavior. In both countries, there are serious discussions as to why school education should offer and support school camps, which teach children sport skills while they are away from home. The data were processed using the Statistica program. *Results:* In both countries, one out of every five individuals (21.6% SK; 22.2% HU) participating in the study take a vacation in the summer months. As children, many (84.5% SK, 92% HU) of the participants took part in school water sport camps. Of these participants, 65.8% of the Slovaks and 60.2% of the Hungarians rated the time spent there as very positive. Among the positive values, 44.2% indicated that the mountains were a favourite and frequently a chosen travel destination. Twenty-five percent of the respondents spend more than four hours hiking during their vacation.

Conclusions: Based on the results of our survey we can conclude that the camps in the mountains can be considered as a useful outdoor program (5-7 days), where the students can experience traveling, living together and having fun.

Key words: school camp, sport tourism, traveling, travel destination.

Introduction

Slovakia and Hungary have a common history in creating public education, which started in 1777. The public elementary and higher elementary school system was founded and many school buildings were built across the country. The main idea of early education was to develop the children's personality, prepare them for social challenges and for becoming a useful citizen. Besides the formal education, there were always out of school programs, courses, and camps to support children's development, especially physical education programs which offered tours in nature, either to the mountains or to the water.

In 19th century the first tourists appeared near waterfronts, and the first infrastructures were built to transport and host such individuals.

When Slovakia and Hungary became independent countries from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the education systems moved away from one another. Several elements still stayed the same, but among the differences was the way in which the out-of-school programs were supported. Slovakia included camps as an obligatory subject in the national curricula, and nearly all students have to participate in those programs. In Hungary, many camps were supported by the government and different educational and civic organizations, but they were only offered as a facultative opportunity.

In both countries, there are ongoing serious discussions regarding how much government should support the outdoor education and if such programs and facilities should even be a part of the national curriculum. The latest curriculum policies promise larger scales of freedom and autonomy for schools. However, the main goal remains one of how natural resources can be taught more effectively in the schools (ISCED 0, 1, 2) specifically in physical education, geography or biology programs (Antala and Labudová, 2008; Kršjaková, 2008; Mikuš-Bebčáková-Modrák, 2008; Šimonek, 2008). The benefits of these programs are not only the learning outcomes, but also special experiences which help students to choose travel destinations and active programs as adults.

To learn about this influence on adults traveling behaviour, the investigators conducted an international comparative study. The definition of outdoor education founded upon six major points by Priest (1986): (1) is a method for learning; (2) is experiential; (3) takes place primarily in the outdoors; (4) requires use of all senses and domains; (5) is based upon interdisciplinary curriculum matter; and (6) is a matter of relationships involving people and natural resources. The main purpose of "outdoor education" is to provide meaningful contextual

experiences - in both natural and constructed environments - that complement and expand classroom instruction, which tends to be dominated by print and electronic media (Knapp, 1996, p. ix).

Hundreds of empirical pre-post studies have been conducted in an attempt to better understand the impacts. Typically, psychosocial constructs such as self-concept are measured before and after outdoor education programs. In order to summarize the results of such studies, five relevant meta-analyses have been conducted. These research reviews show that education programs have small-moderate impacts on constructs such as self-concept, locus of control, and teamwork. Impressively, the effects appeared to be retained over time (Neill 2002).

Table 1. Overall results from five meta-analyses related to outdoor education (Source: Neill, 2002)

Study	Focus	<i>d</i>	<i>N</i> <i>studies</i>	<i>N</i> <i>effects</i>	<i>N</i> <i>participants</i>
Cason & Gillis (1994)	Adventure programming for adolescents	0.31	43	147	2,291
Hattie et al. (1997)	Adventure education and Outward Bound programs	0.34	96	1,728	12,057
Hans (2000)	Adventure programming locus of control outcomes	0.38	24	30	1,632
Marsh, P. E. (1999)	Camping programs	0.20	22	37	na
Bunting & Donley (2002)	Ropes Challenge Courses	0.55	15	na	na
Gillis & Speelman (2008)	Ropes challenge courses	0.43	44	390	2,796

In Central Europe, thousands of young people participate in informal pedagogic experiences from short overnight excursions to week-long outings organized by schools, organizations or families. The main purpose to organize this kind of programs are to provide best opportunities to get away from normal routines, to refresh one's body functions, or relax in natural environment (Meier-Mitchel, 1985). Leisure specialists have written regarding the generic values of camps, which focus on helping to understand democracy, experiencing individual growth and development (Ball-Ball, 2004). Some studies report on the serious effectiveness of camps, which kinesthetically engage participants on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels (Freeman et al., 2012). The outdoor education program provide educational opportunities and contribute to youth development (Edginton et al., 2005). All these factors influence the personal behaviour and create the opportunity for motivation to participate in leisure pursuite in later life.

Surveys conducted in the past helped to explain why children who participated in sport camps also returned in later years to those destinations (Müller, 2007). Such camp experiences can, in fact, be recognized as the basics of youth tourism, where the experiences create the future motivation for traveling (Simandi, 2009). In most cases, this kind of motivations, are pushed by needs and expectations and pulled by emotional benefits (Banhidi, 2012). Consequently, emotional and experiential needs are relevant in pleasure-seeking and choice behavior. From a information processing point of view of past experiences, (like memories from camps), suggests that it is a mental imagery leading to anticipatory behaviors and serves as a motivating force that mediates emotional experiences, evaluations, and behavioral intentions (Goosens, 2000).

For this current study, it was very important to investigate how positive memories support choice behavior. If children felt comfortable in camps, were they looking for similar experiences, or not? An earlier survey with tourists show that positive and negative tourist experiences were not the inverse of one another but highlighted different need structures. Further, it was demonstrated that there is a "motivational career in travel," with more seasoned travelers reporting experiences containing more higher order needs (Pearce-Caltabian, 1983).

Research was completed in Slovakia about outdoors sports activities, like Görner - Kompán (2008) with 12 – 15 year old students and Görner - Mandzák (2011) with 16-18 year old students in 1987 (Zajac and Žišký, 1987) and in 2009 (n=8 400). These age groups show a certain increase in participation, compared to the year 1987. The research shows a 15% increase in swimming and sports games, 13% in cycling and 10% in ice skating. This may be due to the fact that there is a wider range of sports equipment available for families and schools now than there was in 1987. Sport is mostly connected to childhood patterns and systematic physical training is likely to stay with a person in later stages of life as well. It is important for this motivation to stay in the foreground, as sport may become a powerful tool in the shape of one's personality and health (Bollók et al., 2011).

The aim of the study was to demonstrate what effect outdoor education programs, like swimming and water sport camps may have on adult's vacation practices. We predicted the possible outcomes of the effects of sports courses offered in the curricula, on vacation practices in adulthood and the time spent on sports activities.

Material & methods

Participants.

The primary source for gathering information was a questionnaire regarding vacation practices. The questionnaire, which was created with the use of 8 elements, consisted of 28 closed questions. It was completed anonymously by inhabitants of southern Slovakia, (SK, $n_1=2965$) and the North-western part of Hungary (HU, $n_2=2211$). During the sampling we used the accidental sampling method. The questionnaire was developed by the Sports Tourism Section of the Hungarian Sports Science Federation. Among the respondents, there were 58.2% Slovaks, 41.8% Hungarians, 61.5% males and 58% women. When distributing the queried to age groups, SK-70%; HU-57,5% form the part of active workers. SK-23% HU-46,6% are below the age 26, while the senior citizens – age 55 and above – form SK-7%; HU-0,2% of those surveyed.

Procedures

For evaluation, investigators used descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, percentages and means recorded mainly on spread sheets to evaluate the gathered primary data. As our first step, we created our datasheet by coding in the received answers. Afterwards, contingency sheets were created to ease the processing of data. The questionnaire primarily concerned the vacation practices of those queried. During the processing of the data, the investigators sought to determine whether or not two nominal or ordinal variables are interrelated. Among the statistic computer programs, we preferred using the Statistical11 data structure management software.

Results

In the study, the investigators discovered differences between the two countries concerning the national conditions, state's support and personal experiences of attending swimming and water sport camps. The natural resources of Central Europe offer spectacular destinations for youth activities (Gúčík, 2000; Gúčík et al., 2006, 2007, Banhidi 2011). According to the geographical data, 59% of the country is mountains in Slovakia, 41% forest (Capuliak, 2011), Hungary 28% (Banhidi, 2011), where numerous water sport centers have been developed (Figure 1.). They provide excellent opportunities for the scholastic-based outdoor programs. The results of the survey show clearly that natural conditions determine the opportunities for sending children to the camps. Slovakia has 49,755 km of watercourses (including small canals), with an average of 1,015 km of watercourse per km² of territory. The largest watercourses include the Danube (with an average annual flow rate of 1,900 m³/second); Vah (150 m³/second); Morava (110 m³/second); and Bodrog (110 m³/second). At these quick rivers several watersport centers were founded. Several athletes from these clubs achieved world ranks in water sports (Lauko, 2003).

Hungary has one of the highest levels of surface water supply per capita in Europe. Its distribution, however, is not uniform, and the Hungarian population suffers from both floods and droughts. More than 95 percent of Hungary's surface water arrives from abroad, meaning that the quality of most of its water has been determined before it arrives. There has been a significant decrease in the natural water supply in lakes Balaton, Velence and Fertő since the 1990s. Comparing the annual average natural water supply during the 1960s and 1970s with that of the 1990s, a decrease of 43 percent can be seen in Lake Balaton and of 58 percent in Lake Velence. This tendency is affected by climate change and extreme weather events. The most unified water surface (592 km²) has the Lake Balaton with an average water temperature during the summer 25°C (Banhidi 2011).

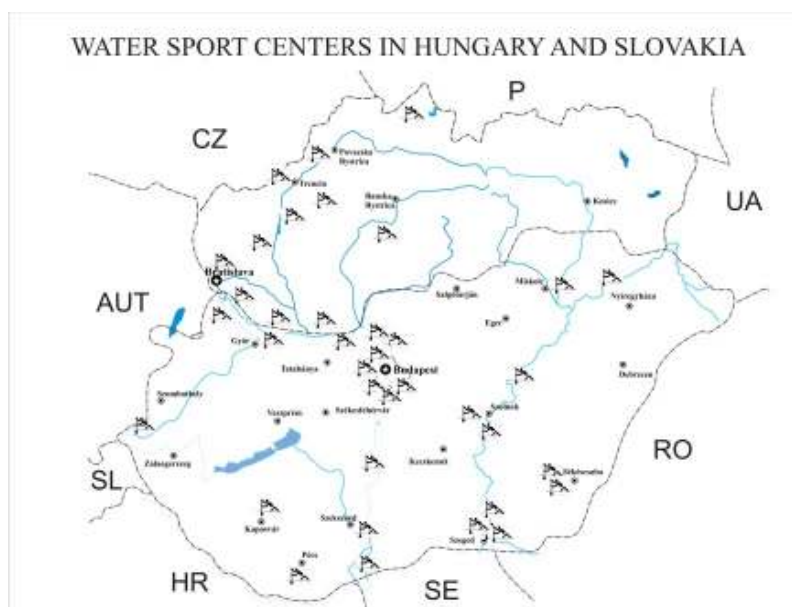


Fig. 1. Water sports centers in Slovakia and Hungary

In both countries, the states support outdoor education differently. In Slovakia, the school curricula describe the organization of sports camps as a compulsory-elective activity, which is included in the physical education curriculum. The curricula – ISCED 0, 1, 2, and 3 – the aberrations of school age groups and the correlation are assured by thematic units.

The curriculum of scholastic physical education program offers an opportunity for teachers and students to attend various sports courses as part of their educational experience. Among sports, swimming hiking, and skiing enjoy priority (Melicher and Slezák, 2000). At each educational level, teachers educate students on hiking information and organize competitions. At each age level, outdoor water sport programs are mostly connected with beach activities, swimming, kayaking and canoeing to motivate students (Guziová, 2011; Dobay, 2007). High school students are under regulation of paragraph 2009/282, accepted on July 24, 2009, which involves the measure 245/2008 with respect to excursions, healthy lifestyle, environmental and outdoor sports activities. This policy states that in these courses there needs to be at least 15 active hours, which can be varied by commuting daily, or as a course, which can take up to five working days. High school students should learn through physical activities the basics of first-aid (Šimonek, 2008). Specialists are convinced that good hiking knowledge is acquired by students graduating from school (Antala – Labudová – Górný, 2010).

In Hungary there are no obligatory sport camps included in the curricula. But every school has an opportunity to offer a couple of days an elective program for their students during the school year. In the last few years, “Forest Schools” have become a popular event offered by biology teachers.

The research on the impact of outdoor experiences on vacation practices was undertaken by asking how often subjects in the study participate at least on a week-long holiday during the summer or winter (Figure 2.) and what are their favourite activities.

When looking at summer holidays, 21.6% of the Slovaks and 22.2% of the Hungarians travel every year on a longer term vacation. The answers reveal that 42% of the Slovaks and 62.2% of the Hungarians in the study choose lakes as their favourite summer destinations. 32.1% (SK) and 32.4% like also river side holidays doing water sport activities. The difference between the countries is that most of the Hungarians have easier access to lakes (like Balaton) with a developed touristic infrastructure and sport services.

Citizens from both countries prefer longer vacations in the summer, going to the seaside (53.9%-SK, 52.4%-HU), even if they have to leave to other countries. To see more detailed the relationship between the camp memories and the vacation’s choice, a correlation analysis was investigated (Table 2.). In the correlation matrix we can see, that the majority of the Slovaks choose water sites, who rated the outdoor camps more positive. Similar tendencies could be found among the Hungarian trials. At them the higher R values testify a stronger significance among the parameters, which can be connected to their stronger emotional experience.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of measured parameters (n_{sk}-2649; n_{hu}-2211 p<0,05)

SLOVAKIA	SWIMM.	SWI								
	WATER-SPORT	0,2548	WS							
	LAKE	0,0992	0,1371	LAKE						
	RIVER	0,0647	0,1497	0,5317	RIVER					
	SEA	0,1904	0,1050	0,0711	0,0797	SEA				
HUNGARY	SWIMM.	-0,0265	-0,0163	-0,0336	-0,0348	-0,0322	SWI			
	WATER-SPORT	-0,0347	-0,0136	-0,0340	-0,0308	-0,0345	0,9894	WS		
	LAKE	0,0377	-0,0243	-0,0189	-0,0550	0,0175	0,3569	0,2451	LAKE	
	RIVER	0,0124	-0,0231	-0,0378	-0,0531	0,0172	0,6029	0,5419	0,8449	RIVER
	SEA	0,0220	-0,0226	-0,0319	-0,0529	-0,0176	0,6065	0,5057	0,8477	0,7785

To determine the role of childhood experiences, the participants were asked how they rated their outdoor education programs (Fig. 3). They rated their feelings using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating. The differences between the countries are not significant, even if we expected stronger impact of the obligatory aspect of the Slovak curricula. The highest attendance ratings were found at the Slovaks in camps of swimming (73.3%) and ski camps (72.5%), which were the part of their school curriculum.

It was surprising that only 66.4% of the Slovaks reported attending water sport camps, even if it was a part of the national curricula and the country has so many beautiful holiday offers at water.

In both countries, most adults who attended these programs enjoyed them very much (Figure 2.). 70.5% of the Slovaks and 65.5% of the Hungarians rated swimming camps good or excellent. 61.2% (SK) 78.5% (HU). These activities in the camps created positive memories for the participants.

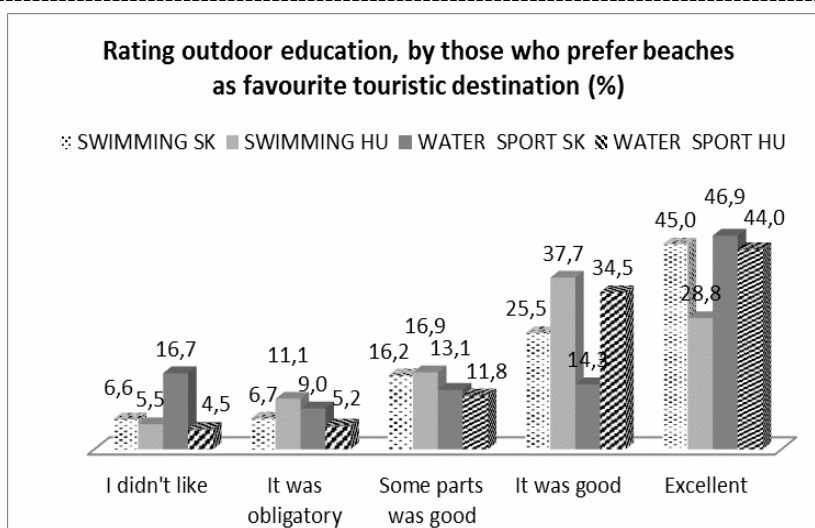


Fig. 2. Rating of outdoor education programs

The questionnaire asked participants if they had a good time in the water sport camps would they select beaches (lakes) as their favourite holiday destination. According to the response (Figure 4.), 23.3% of the Slovaks and 38.2% of the Hungarians choose beaches as their favourite destination for longer vacations. This information may demonstrate positive effects from the school camps on adulthood vacations to the water sites.

Looking at the type of destinations those participants, who rated the swimming camps good or excellent, 33.5-81.6% of them choose waterfront destination for their vacations (Figure 3.). Comparing the 2 selected countries at the Hungarian trials the lake is playing dominant role choosing location for their longer vacation. We think the reason is the long tradition and richer opportunities to spend holidays at the lakes (Lake Balaton, Lake Fertő, Lake Tisza...). Also most of the summer school activities are organized at these locations, which are safer than at the rivers.

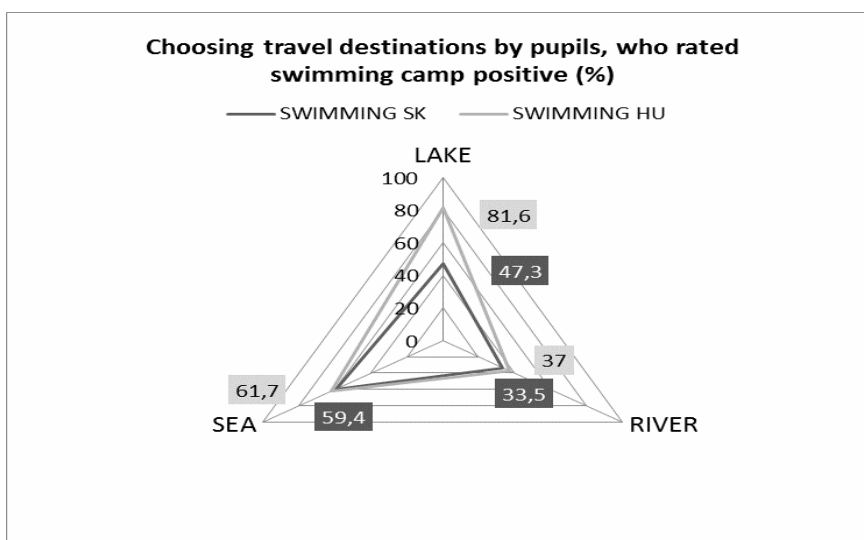


Fig. 3. Choosing waterfront location with good memories at former swimming camps

We analyzed also the effects of water sport activities (Figure 4.). Those trials who had good memories in former water sport camps, more than the half of them choose lakes as popular travel destination (SK-67.7%, HU-54.1%). It was a bit surprise, that less people select the rivers as longer vacation, where they could do enough water sport activities.

Otherwise we know still rivers don't have enough infrastructure for holidays, except camp sites and water sport clubs.

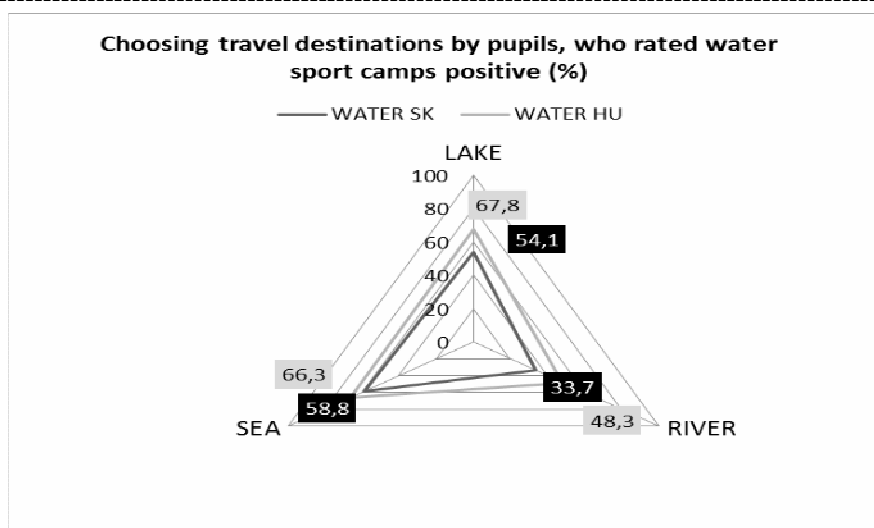


Fig 4. Choosing waterfront location with good memories at former water sport camps

Discussion

Participation in outdoor education is a complex pedagogic method, which has as its main aim to learn about the beauties of nature and experience cultural memories (Ludvík et al. 1986). A similar definition is used by Žiškay et al. (1998), Junger (2002), Kostencka (2007), Bendíková (2008), Napierala et al. (2009). According to these authors, outdoor activities can be thought of as a special trip, which is a part of movement culture and gaining knowledge. Participating in sports activity in nature is one of the most widely used movement culture activities in the field of recreation, independently from age, gender and social background (Pach, 2009). Therefore, such activities may become integral parts of holidays and can be the best tool for spiritual recreation (Meier-Mitchell, 1993, Cavill et al., 2006).

Active programs in nature play an important role in the curricula of both countries, although the Slovak curricula includes more precisely the requirements which emphasizes the desires of the era and shows the new ways of teaching and learning. In Hungary, most of the camp owners have an economical interest in offering optimal facilities for young people. In 2004, more than 53000 children participated in outdoor camps financed by government ministries especially for school camps and individuals who are socially disadvantaged (Mester 2008). Many educational institutions use this opportunity, as it is common even for kindergarten teachers to organize sports courses. Kindergarten teachers are allowed to organize active programs in nature and winter sports courses for children age five and over. Therefore, the survey also confirms the opportunity for students to take part in sport courses in nature (Modrák et al. 2010).

Conclusions

In both school systems decision makers are beginning to recognize value in learning outside the classroom after a period of concentration on raising narrowly defined standards through didactic teaching methods, but barriers to outdoor learning appear to remain in practice. Like our survey has shown childhood experiences can affect adults in the choice. An excellent opportunity for fostering growth and development including identity formulation can be camps supported by schools and different organizations. Such camps should be organized with a large variety of interesting programs, taking into consideration the needs and expectations of young people. Outdoor education programs can create positive experiences, which can be a strong motivation for traveling behaviour in one's adulthood.

At the present time, tourism offerings in both countries have become very expensive and, for some young people, supported camps are the only opportunity to travel and, as such, to visit natural and historic sites. The survey results point out that outdoor education programs as a part of the school curriculum can help students learn about nature and the enjoyment of physical activities. Adults in both countries who rated the childhood experiences more positive, they choose lake, river or seaside as their future travel destinations.

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