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YOUTH PREFERENCES IN SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH



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SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

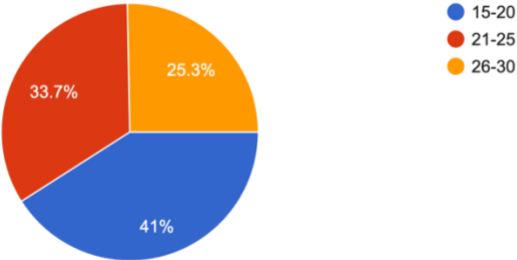
Processing of statistical data within the research on the youth preferences in sport and physical activities includes a sample of 332 respondents, representatives of citizens aged 15 to 30 years old from Serbia, Croatia, and North Macedonia. The overall goal of the research was to determine current habits and models of participation of young people in sports and physical activities and to identify how they are changing. The research was divided into four thematic units: 1. Introduction, 2. The general level of physical activity, 3. Sports preferences and 4. Motivation for being physically active.

The above-mentioned thematic units will be analyzed on the basis of the data collected by the online questionnaire. The following paragraphs represent a presentation of the descriptive statistics of all variables in the research in order to determine general trends, test research hypotheses, and make research conclusions about the examined issue.

- **THEMATIC UNIT 1 - Introduction**

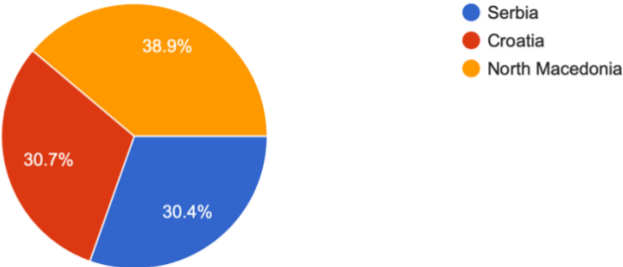
The statistical analysis will commence with the overview of the results from the first thematic unit - **Introduction**. This unit will enable us to examine the sample characteristics based on the age range and gender of participants, their country and place of residence, and the social category in which they belong.

Graph 1: Age categories of research participants



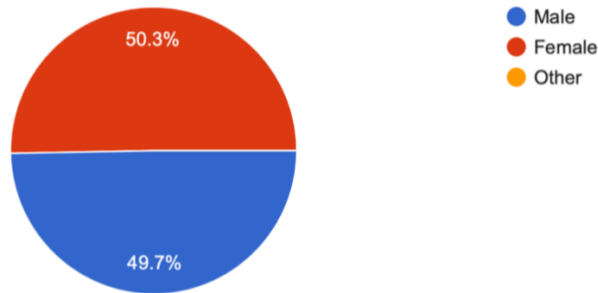
Among the research participants most of them belong to the age group of 15-20 years old (41%), followed by the age group 21-25 years old (33,7%). The smallest number of respondents belong to the age range 26-30 years old, at 25,3%.

Graph 2: Country of residence of the research participants



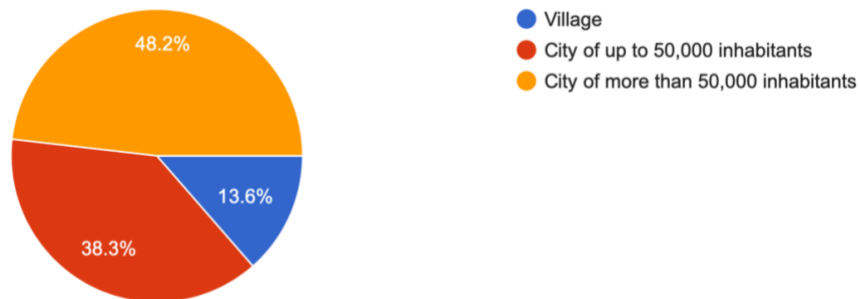
The research was intended to encompass at least 100 respondents from each country and that goal has been met. The total number of registered responses was 332. The most participants were from North Macedonia - 129 or 38,9% of the sample, followed by Croatia at 102 or 30,7% and Serbia at 101 or 30,4%.

Graph 3: Gender identification of the research participants



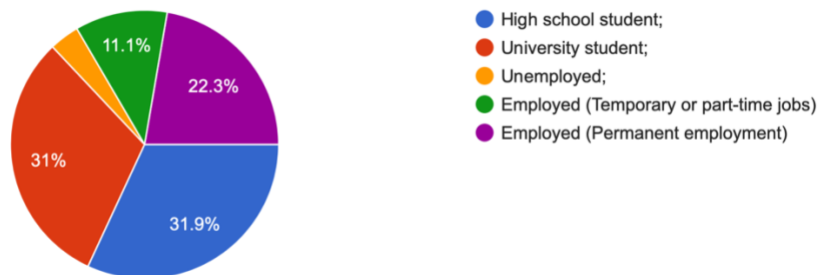
The gender structure of the research sample is balanced at 50,3% of respondents stating that they are male, and 49,7% of respondents stating they are female. There were no respondents who refused to state gender or choose the option „Other“.

Graph 4: Place of residence of the research participants



Close to half of the research participants are living in a city of more than 50.000 residents (48,2%). A city of up to 50.000 inhabitants is a residence of 38,2% of the respondents while only 13,6% of them live in a village.

Graph 5: Socio-economic categories of the research participants

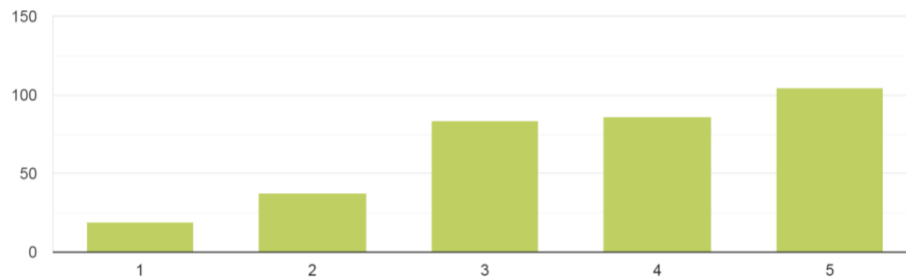


When it comes to the variable „socio-economic category“ we see that the sample is less uniform in comparison with the previous variables. Based on the data shown in Graph 5 we see that most respondents are high school students (31,9%) and university students (31%), while 11,1% are temporarily employed and 3,6% are unemployed. In permanent employment is 22,3% of the research participants.

- **THEMATIC UNIT 2 - General level of physical activity**

Now that we have introduced ourselves to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample we will proceed to the introduction of the research results for the second thematic unit - **The general level of physical activity**. This research unit encompassed 4 questions aimed at determining the frequency at which young people engage in sports and physical activities, and which effect did the ongoing pandemic have on that.

Graph 6: The current physical activity level of the research participants



Among young people who participated in the research physical activity is generally high. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is an indicator of not having any physical activity while 5 indicates a very high level of physical activity 5,7% of research participants said that they have no physical activity, 11,4% are barely active, 25,3% are somewhat active, 25,9% are fairly active and 31,6% are training daily and are highly active.

Graph 7: Weekly level of activity of the research participants

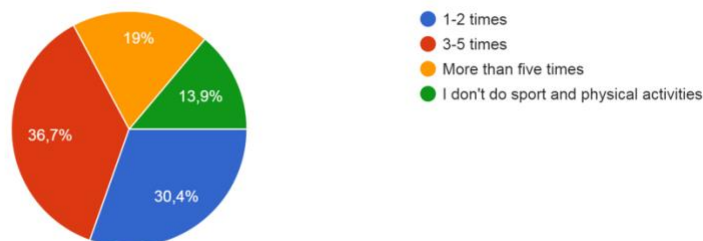
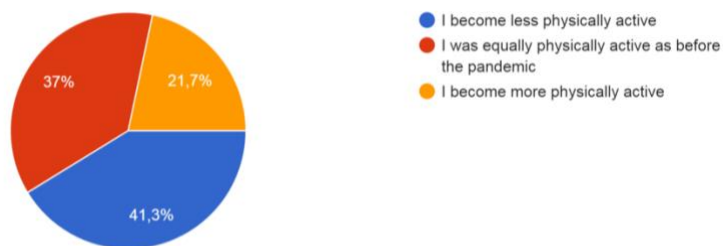


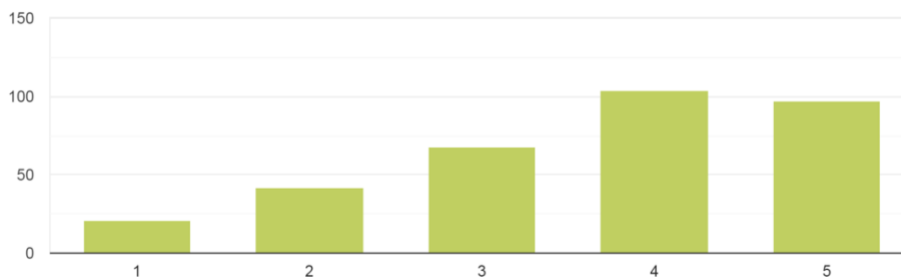
Chart 7 displays how many times respondents train weekly. According to the research findings 13.9% of research participants answered that they do not do any sport or physical activity, 30,4% answers were 1-2 times a week, 36,7% of respondents answered that they do physical activity 3-5 times a week and 19% of respondents are engaging in physical activity more than 5 times a week.

Graph 8: Effects of the pandemic on a level of physical activity of research participants



When it comes to the influence of pandemics on the level of physical activity the plurality of respondents stated that they became less physically active - 41.3% to be exact. On the other hand, 37% of respondents said that they have remained equally physically active as before the pandemic and 21.7% of respondents became more active in the pandemic.

Graph 9: Physical activity levels of participants before the start of the pandemic

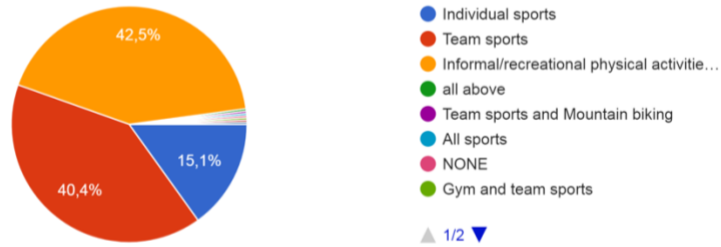


Respondents answered on a scale of 1 to 5 about how much were they physically active before the pandemic. Answers indicate that 6% of them weren't active at all, 12.7% used to be minimally active, 20,5% of respondents were moderately active, 31.3% of respondents used to be fairly active and 29,2% of respondents used to do physical activities at a very high level.

- THEMATIC UNIT 3 - Sports preferences**

The following paragraphs are dedicated to the analysis of questions related to the third thematic unit - **Sports preferences** of young people.

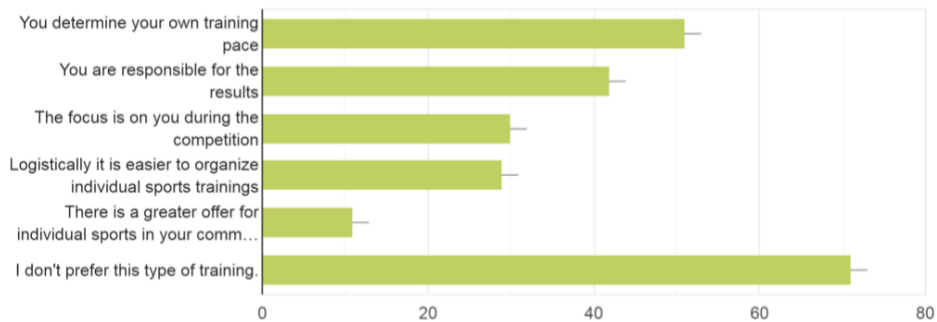
Graph 10: Sports preferences among of the research participants



When asked about their physical activity preferences 42,5% of the respondents stated that they are involved in informal/recreational activities (Gym, Pilates, Cycling, etc). Around 40,4% are involved in team sports and 15,1% are engaged in individual sports.

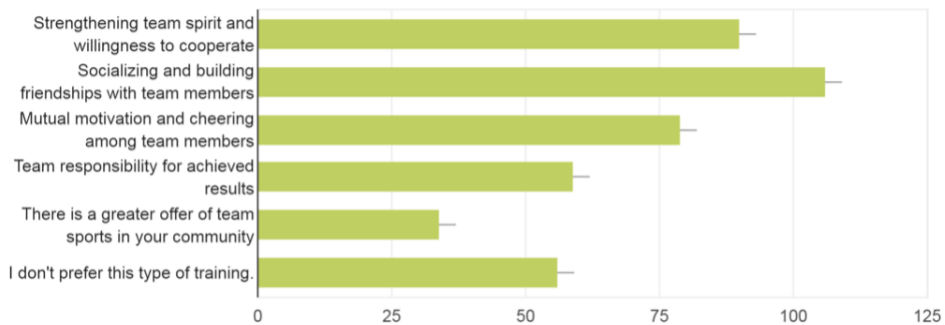
In the following set of 3 questions, research participants had an opportunity to state why they prefer the specific type of physical activity that they choose in question 10. These questions allowed participants to choose up to 3 responses that best describe their attitudes.

Graph 11a: What is the reason for young people to get involved into individual sports



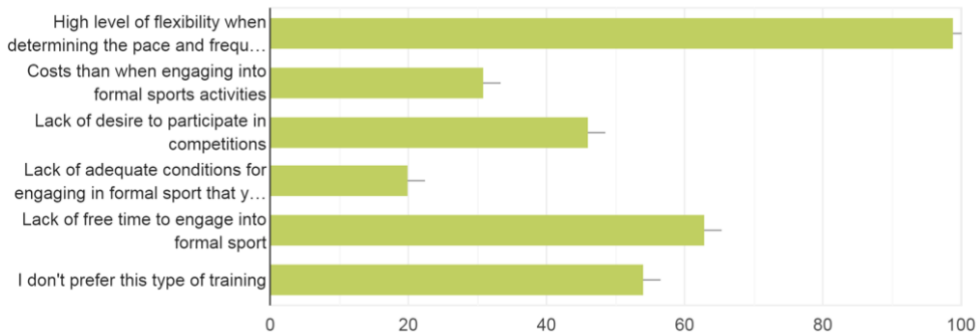
Most of the respondents who prefer individual sports (44,1%) said that it's because it allows them to determine their own training pace, 26,4% answered that the reason is that they are responsible for their own results and 18,9% chose them due to the focus being on them when participating in competitions. When it comes to more practical aspects of choosing individual sports, 18,2% of respondents said that it's because it is logistically easier to organize individual sports trainings and 6,9% of respondents said that there is a greater offer for individual sports in their community.

Graph 11b: What is the reason for young people to get involved into team sports



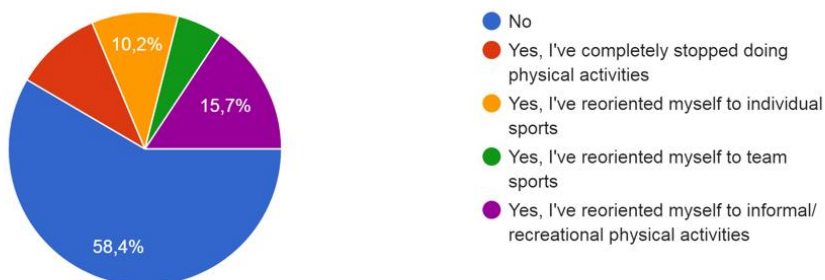
44,1% of respondents who prefer team sports chose them because they contribute to strengthening team spirit and willingness to cooperate, 52% said it's because of socializing and building friendships, 38,7% are choosing team sports due to mutual motivation and cheering among team members. 28,9% of respondents prefer team sports because of team responsibility for achieved results and 16,7% of respondents chose them because there is a greater offer of team sports in their community.

Graph 11c: What is the reason for young people to engage in informal/recreational physical activities



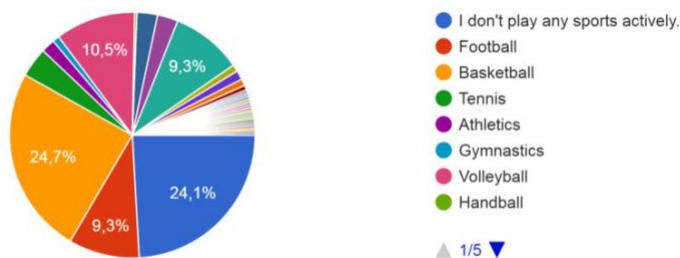
The main reason people chose Informal/recreational physical activities is that they allow a high level of flexibility when determining the pace and frequency of training (45,6%). Other reasons are noticeably less represented: Lack of free time for formal sports (28%), Lack of desire to participate in competitions (21,3%), Lower costs in comparison to formal physical activities (14,3%), and Lack of adequate conditions for engaging in formal sport in their community (9,2%).

Graph 12: Changes in the type of physical activity preferences due to the Covid-19 pandemic



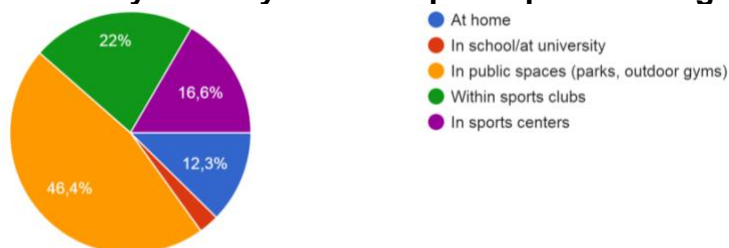
Graph 12 shows how much the Covid-19 pandemic effect physical activity preferences. We noted a wide array of answers but a significant majority of 58,4% stated that the pandemic didn't affect their physical activity preferences, while on the other hand 10.2% of respondents completely stopped doing physical activities due to the pandemic. When it comes to the impact of the pandemic on the change of type of physical activities 10.2% of respondents switched to individual sports, 15,7% started doing informal/recreational physical activities while only 5,4% reoriented their preferences to team sports.

Graph 13: Primarily played sports among research participants



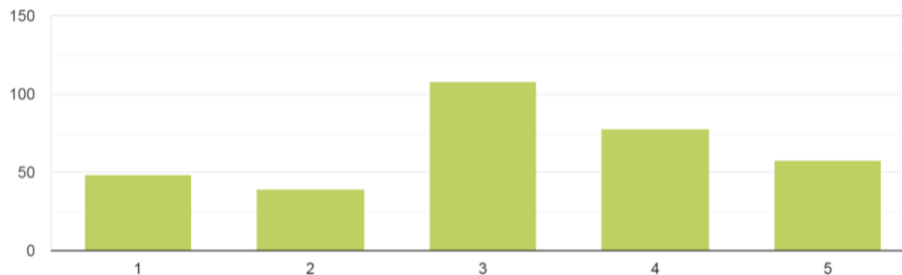
Graph 13 shows that the sample is not uniform when it comes to the variable „sports that people primarily engage in“. We see that close to a quarter of people aren't actively engaged in sports (24,1%) and among those who are active the most popular spots are basketball at 24,7%, volleyball at 10,5%, and football at 9,3%. The least popular sports are rowing (0,5%), table tennis (0,3%) and yoga (0,3%).

Graph 14: Environment mostly used by research participants to engage in sports



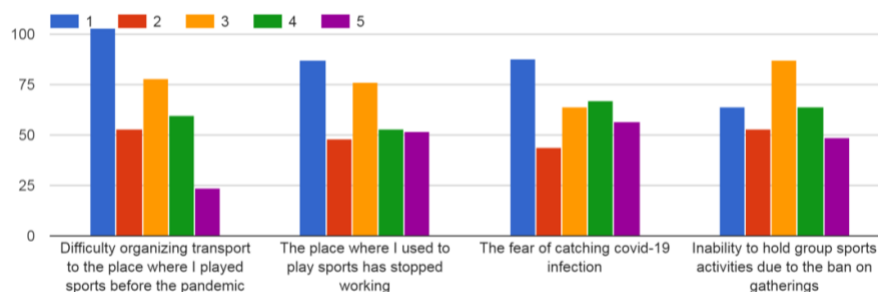
As shown in graph 14, 40,4% of research participants are using public spaces such as parks and outdoor gyms to engage in sports, 22% are using sports clubs' spaces, and 16,6% are utilizing commercial sports centers. There are also 12,3% of respondents who engage in physical activities at home. Only 2,7% of them are engaging in sports in schools/universities.

Graph 15: Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on training space preferences



On a scale of 1 to 5, the research participants answered how much did the Covid-19 pandemic impact their preferences when it comes to the places where they engage in sports. The mark 1 means that there has been no impact at all, while 5 means that the impact was very high. In total, 26,8% of participants choose marks 1 and 2, close to a third assessed the impact as medium, and selected option 3 (32,5%) while 23,5% and 17,5% picked marks 4 and 5, respectively.

Graph 16: Impact of different factors on the change of environment in which people engage in physical activities

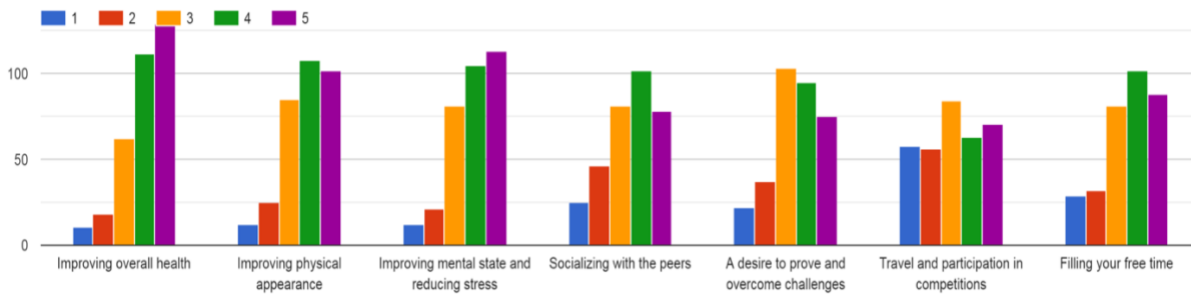


In graph 16 we can see to what extent did different factors influence the change of the place for engaging in physical activities. Based on the results it is not possible to single out one factor that had the greatest impact. Difficulty organizing transport to the place of training didn't have as much impact as the inability to hold group sports activities due to the restrictions. The fear of getting infected by Covid-19 also had a significant impact, just as the fact that many locations where participants used to engage in sports were temporarily closed.

- **THEMATIC UNIT 4 - Motivation for being physically active**

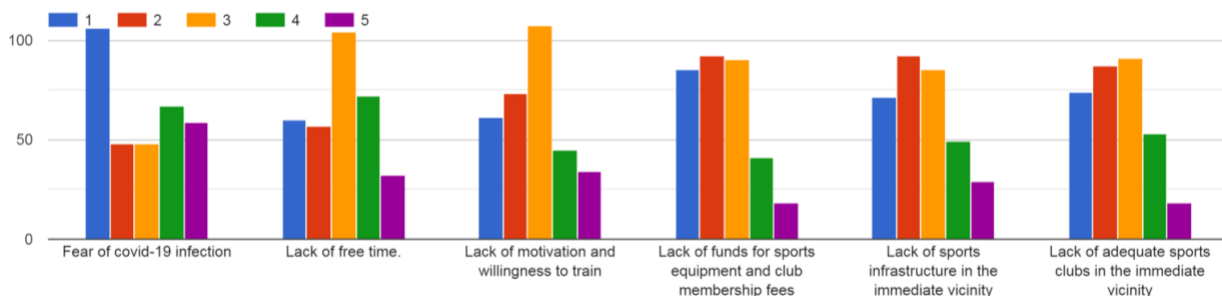
The following 5 questions belong to the final thematic unit of the research - **Motivation for being physically active**. As its name suggests, the goal of this unit was to determine which factors influence the willingness of young people to engage in physical activities, as well as to find out what additional recreational, educational, or volunteering activities offered by sports clubs are the most attractive to youth.

Graph 17: Factors that motivated respondents to engage in sports and physical activities



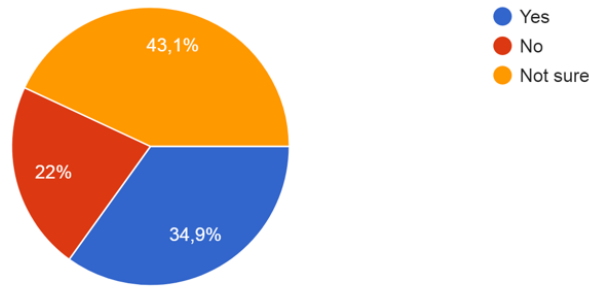
The main factors that motivate young people to engage in sport and physical activities are improving overall health, physical appearance, and mental state. When it comes to responses related to “Filling free time” and “Traveling and participating in competitions” the results have shown that their impact on motivation is markedly smaller.

Graph 18: Factors that negatively influence respondents to engage in sports and physical activities



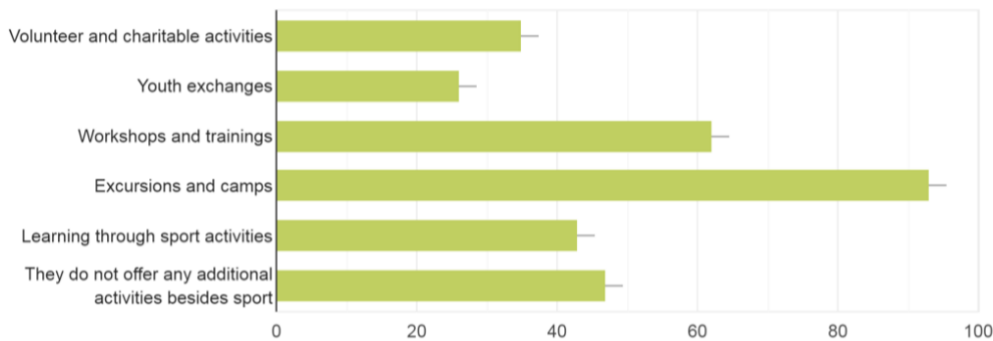
Similarly to the previous question, there was no single factor that had dramatically larger negative impact in comparison to others. As shown in graph 18 negative effects that had most impact were lack of motivation or willingness to train and the lack of time. Fear of Covid-19 infection, the lack of funds or lack of sports infrastructure had overall moderate impact on respondents engaged in sport and physical activities.

Graph 19: Additional recreational, educational, or volunteering activities offered by the local sports club



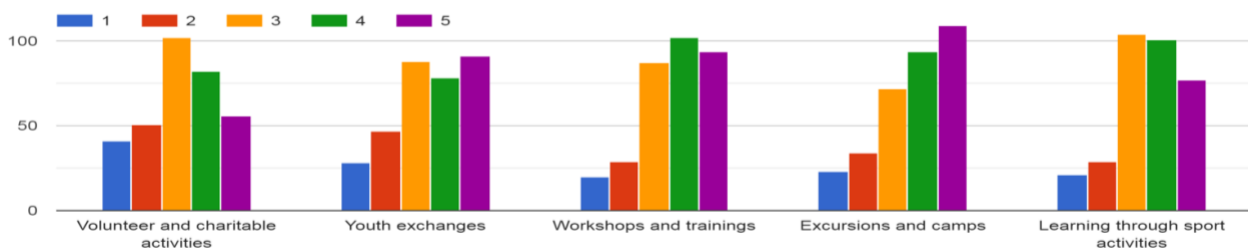
Not surprisingly, most of the respondents didn't know or weren't aware of whether local sports clubs offer any additional activities (43,1%). On the other hand, 34,9% of research participants have stated that local clubs offer additional activities while 22% of clubs do not offer any additional activities.

Graph 20: Type of additional activities offered by sports clubs



The clubs that have additional activities for young people offer excursions and camps (52,8%), workshops and NFE trainings (35,2%), Learning through sports activities (24,4%), youth exchanges (14,8%), and volunteer/charitable activities (19,9%).

Graph 21: Attractiveness level of additional activities offered



The activities that would motivate young people to join local sports clubs the most are learning through sports activities, excursions and camps, and NFE workshops/trainings. Volunteer and charitable activities and youth exchanges have been shown to be slightly less attractive but would still be interesting to many young people.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main idea of the research was to provide answers to the questions of what the current habits and models of participation of young people in sports and physical activities are, as well as how they are changing. This section of the document contains a discussion of the research results in relation to the research tasks.



The first task of the research was to determine what percentage of young people are physically active and/or engage in sports on a regular level and how pandemic has influenced them in that field. The results showed that more than half of respondents state that they belong in the category of highly active individuals in regard to sports and physical activity. Another positive finding is that close to 55% of young people engage in sports at least 3 times per week, with an additional 30% doing so at least once per week. This data shows that there is a large number of young people in Serbia, Croatia and North Macedonia who are interested in engaging in sports activities. Not only these active young people, but also the ones who are not engaged in any physical activity, represent a target group that should be approached more actively by organizations, institutions, and sports clubs in order to stimulate them to live a healthy and active lifestyle. This is especially important when we take in consideration the fact that we are still recovering from the detrimental effects of the pandemic on young people's ability to engage in sports.



When it comes to the impact of the pandemic on the level of young people's physical activity it led to a decrease in physical activity in more than 40% of respondents. A similar percentage of people remained on the same level of activity as before the pandemic, with only a few becoming more active. When research participants were asked to numerically assess their level of physical activity before and after the start of a pandemic on a scale of 1 to 5 the results once more confirmed the assumption that the decrease in the overall level and intensity of physical activity has affected significant portion of young people. The pandemic and accompanying disease prevention measures impacted the ability of young people to engage in physical activities in several ways. They made it more difficult to organize transportation to the places where people used to train, many sports centers and related facilities stopped working, public gatherings were banned, and a fear of catching Covid-19 prevented many people from getting involved. The long-term consequences of a decline in physical activity levels can have severe consequences on the productivity, overall health, and longevity of entire generations of people. That is why it is of the utmost importance to reverse the trends that have led to the decline or stagnation in young people's activity levels.

The second research task was to examine in what sports and physical activities young people most commonly engage in and in which places. Firstly, we asked them to tell us what type of physical activities they prefer, and the percentage of people interested in informal/recreational activities and in team sports was pretty equal at 42% and 40% respectively. Only 15% of people said that they prefer individual sports. Among people who prefer informal recreational activities such as yoga,



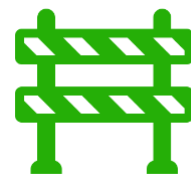
going to the gym, or cycling the main reason for that was the high level of flexibility when determining the workout pace, as well as the lack of free time for engaging in formal sports. For the people interested in team sports the main benefits are the opportunities to socialize with their peers, build team spirit and receive encouragement from teammates. The people who prefer individual sports have stated that the reasons for engaging in them are the ability to determine your own training pace and that the sportsperson is the only one who is responsible for achieving results.

Among the physically active respondents, the most popular sports are basketball, volleyball, and football. The biggest number of people, close to half of the surveyed people, engage in sports in public spaces (parks, outdoor gyms). There is also a small portion of people training at home, at around 13%. Only a third of respondents engage in sports in sports centers or within clubs. These findings are in line with a trend that was noticed all around the world since the beginning of the pandemic, with many increasingly showing interest in engaging in physical activities in outdoor public spaces or at home rather than in dedicated sports facilities. It is becoming increasingly clear that the sports clubs that want to continue functioning and attract new members will have to adapt to the new modes of engaging in sports that have emerged among young people. Flexibility and access to outdoor venues are starting to be major “selling points” of clubs.



The third task was to determine what motivates young people to engage in sports, and what factors demotivate or prevent them from being physically active. The research showed that, by far, the biggest motivational factors are related to the well-being of an individual, both when it comes to physical appearance, overall health improvement, and reducing stress. The main negative factors that prevent people from being more physically active are the lack of free time, inadequate sports infrastructure in their communities, and the lack of funds for sports equipment and club memberships.

The previous overview of research results is enabling us to give some answers to the fourth research task and to identify the socio-economic categories of young people that have disproportionately difficult access to physical activities. Based on the respondents’ answers to questions regarding the impact of negative factors on the level of engaging in sports we have determined that the low quality of sports infrastructure, financial insecurity, and lack of free time are the most significant obstacles. The lack of sports infrastructure and adequate clubs is the most pronounced problem in rural areas. And since there are no reliable and frequent public transit options in most villages of Serbia, Croatia, and North Macedonia this makes the aforementioned problem even more severe as many young people are unable to frequently commute to larger cities in order to access sports opportunities. The other major problem that was detected is that there is a portion of young people who are unable to finance sports equipment and membership fees in clubs. This problem is traditionally most pronounced among the population of students who attend universities away from their home cities, young people from rural areas, and young people from marginalized groups, such as Roma. As for the lack of free time as an obstacle to sports engagement, it is most common among young people who



are forced to do multiple jobs in order to support themselves, and among young people who are in employment during studies. One more group of young people who have very difficult time engaging in sports are people with disabilities due to lack of mobility assistance and not enough clubs offering parasports activities.



The next important section of the survey was focused on completing the fifth and final research task, which was to identify the content and form of additional programs offered by sports clubs to young people in order to motivate them to become more physically active. The research results have demonstrated that many grassroots sports clubs are not very effective in communicating their offer to young people since more than

43% of respondents were not aware if their local clubs offer any additional recreational, educational, or volunteering activities. Only a third of research participants have stated that they are familiar with additional activities offered by sports clubs in their communities. Among those activities, the most often implemented are excursions and camps, NFE workshops and trainings, and “learning through sports” activities. When asked to pick out activities that would motivate them to join a club offering them, our respondents were most interested in excursions and camps and NFE workshops and trainings. The main conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this research task is that the sports clubs that offer additional activities are significantly more attractive to young people who are in the process of selecting a club in which to train. Unfortunately, due to a relatively low level of digital communication skills in many clubs’ staff, their messages and offers are not reaching an adequate number of people. Due to that, many young people are simply unaware that their local clubs are not just places to engage in sports, but also offer valuable non-formal educational opportunities.

Based on the presented research findings a set of conclusions can be drawn:

1. In general, a large portion of young people in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Croatia engage in physical activities on a regular basis. Yet, despite these initial positive findings we have determined that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the physical engagement of young people which manifested in the stagnation or decrease of the activity level among a vast majority of research participants. We have detected a trend of continuous shifting from the formal sports activities organized within clubs to more informal/recreational and outdoor activities. All these findings point out the necessity for sports clubs, institutions, and youth organizations to adapt to the “new normal” when it comes to sports preferences of young people and, in accordance with that, to offer them new modes and methods of engaging in physical activities.
2. The research has also determined that some socio-economic categories among the youth population have significant additional obstacles in accessing sports and physical activity opportunities. These categories are young people from rural areas, young people with low incomes, and young people with disabilities. Solving the issue of decreased accessibility to physical engagement is a major problem that requires the cooperation of clubs, organizations, local authorities and even

national governments. Youth organizations and sports clubs can influence decision makers to deal with this issue by raising awareness, drafting policies, and preparing inclusive educational and sports methodologies.

3. When it comes to the ability of local sports clubs to stimulate young people to join them and become active, the research has demonstrated that clubs that offer additional activities are more attractive to the youth. Despite that, a significant portion of clubs is not doing enough to promote their offer and reach young people who are their main target group. Also, many of them do not recognize the importance of expanding their offer beyond sports to additional activities (Exchanges, workshops, volunteering actions, NFE trainings, etc.). That is where the experience and expertise of the civil society organizations who work with young people can be a valuable tool in building the capacities of sports clubs not just in the field of communication but also in developing nonformal educational programs and methodologies that are in accordance with the youth needs and preferences.



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