Generational differences in the motivational factors that drive Cypriots to participate in sporting activities

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Summary

Study aim: To examine the factors that motivate Cypriots to participate in sport, particularly examining the differences between the last 3 generations regarding their motivations for sport involvement at the present and at the ages of 12-18 years.

Material and methods: The study was completed by survey method among 3 generational groups in Cyprus comprised of secondary school students, their parents, and their grandparents (N=1067). Data were collected via questionnaires that contained 3 open-ended, 16 multiple-choice, and 12 semantic differential scale questions. The response rate was 100% for the students, 77.4% for the parents, and 65.5% for the grandparents. The data were analyzed by the SPSS program for Microsoft Windows; factor analysis and one-way analysis of variance were used.

Results: The examined motivations were clustered into two factors: Joy Factor and Health Factor. Significant differences were found among the 3 generations in their sporting activities at present and the ages of 12-18 years. The students’ participation motivations for sport are closely related to fun and enjoyment. Their parents have similar motives at present, but in their childhood they considered health enhancement as the most important reason for sport involvement. The oldest generation regarded the improvement of their health as a stimulating factor for sport in their childhood and youth; they did not change this during their whole life cycle.

Conclusions: Generational differences in the motivation for participation in sport are probably universal, but their elements are dissimilar depending on the value system in general and in sport in societies. The historical and cultural circumstances in Cyprus allow for the generalization of the conclusions only at the national level.

Key words: Sport participation - Motivation - Generational group - Value transmission

Introduction

Since the members of societies are continuously replaced by new members, generational changes occur over time in all areas of social life, including sport. Likewise, in other fields of society only some of the social norms, values, traditions and behavioral patterns are transmitted more or less unaltered from generation to generation; others are abandoned and/or replaced by new ones, also in sport. Everyday experiences suggest that since modern sport emerged at the end of the past century younger generations have been more and more interested in sport than their seniors. Notwithstanding generational differences in sport sciences have been rarely investigated in connection with sport. The few research works were related to sport administration [19], coaching [12], motivations of sport fans [11] and sporting values [5], and they only examined generational changes between two generations. According to our knowledge the sole sport sociological study dealing with the development and transmission of sporting traditions through 3 generations was carried out at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s in a housing estate in Warsaw [14]. The major conclusions of the latter emphasized the social nature of sport and the decisive impact of the social-political and economic systems the members of the 3 generations were living in on the mechanism of the transmission.

Both society and within it sport as a social institution have undergone tremendous changes over the last centuries. In contrast with half a century ago, the modern lifestyle offers a vast assortment of conveniences such as the Internet, high-definition televisions, video games, and generally appliances that can easily keep anybody busy in a comfortable position on a couch. The technological advantages that the modern society offers its members are admirable, but they also have negative consequences. As the sedentary lifestyle gained ground, obesity became an overall problem. The lack of regular physical activity has become a significant risk factor; it endangers people’s health in all age groups. Over the last decades individuals...
in most societies typically spend over five hours a day in front of the television. The media has gained tremendous power during the last decades and their touch on social life is influential on all aspects, including sports [8]. On the one hand it created consumers and not participants in sport, and its use highly contributed to a dramatic decline in physical activity [9]. On the other hand, the development of media and especially televised sport events and the mediated new sporting movements raised interest in, and up-staged the importance of, exercise. For instance, the so-called fitness boom can be thanked partly to the popularity of the fitness movement in the media.

During the same period, the concept of sport has also been modified. Elite sport diverged from leisure sports and recreational sporting activity. New sports, e.g. aerobic, risk sports and adventure sports, new types of movements, e.g. sport for all and fitness [20], and new target groups, e.g. disabled, elderly and immigrants, emerged. Sport was attributed to non-traditional values: post-modern values, excitement, and autonomy [17]. The social functions of sport broadened, and the set of motivations for sport participation became more complex [13]. Nowadays, many people do sport and exercise for different reasons or for different purposes than did their predecessors. The person’s changing needs and expectations of people are also visible in the diverse and new motives of sport participants. Research has been undertaken to determine the individual participant’s motivation for sport and exercise in different historical periods; however, neither the research focusing on 2 generations nor the study comparing sporting values with 3 generations examined motivations driving people in different generational groups to be involved in sport. Studies with a similar topic could not be found in the relevant literature.

Parallel with the slowly increasing importance of sport in the Cypriot society in the last decades, several research projects have been carried out regarding various social issues in national sport, but generational differences in sport related motivations have not been studied here, either. Taking into consideration that sport is a mirror of society and that in Cyprus sweeping social, political, cultural, and economic changes occurred successively within just few decades, it can be rightly assumed that these changes might also be reflected in the population’s sporting values, habits, behaviors, and participation motivations for sport in a special way.

Research findings suggest that sport habits can generally be renewed or borrowed and adapted from the past [18]. Cypriot sport seems to have been changed partly according to traditions and to the national appreciation of sport, and partly to the changes in international sport and sport policies [1]. The opportunities for being involved in sports have enlarged; accessibility to sport by people of different age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds has improved recently on the inland. New needs in connection with sport were born and the ways satisfying the altered needs for sport also have been modified [4]. The Cyprus Sport Organization, which is the body responsible for developing sport at a national level, makes serious efforts to prepare right and adequate programs for sport for all and to make adequate suggestions to improve the physical education programs at school, but the efficiency of its activity is hindered by the lack of scientifically based information on the particular sporting values, norms, habits, motives, and behavioral patterns of the population’s different age groups. In order to provide the decision makers in Cypriot sport with information on the basis of which they can plan their policy and with which they can realize their projects in a more effective way, a special topic out of the above-mentioned issues was chosen for investigation. Namely, we examined the factors motivating Cypriots to participate in sporting activities. We discovered the major differences between the last 3 generational groups regarding their motivations for being involved in sport at the present time and at the age of 12-18 years, respectively. The purpose of this paper is to give a brief report on this research and present the main results concerning the differences in motivations for sport of 3 successive generations.

Material and Methods

The research was carried out by survey method. The students attending Cypriot secondary schools in the academic year 2007-2008, their parents, and grandparents were regarded as the total population of the research. At first, the student sample was gradually selected by stratified sampling according to regions (mainland, coastal, and mountain areas of Cyprus), the type of the secondary schools (gymnasiums and lyceums), the gender, and the grade of the students. The students in the individual schools were randomly selected. Then a snowball selection followed for the parents’ and grandparents’ sample, via the students.

The sample consisted of 3 stratification schemes or sub-samples, more specifically 741 students, 229 parents, and 97 grandparents. Due to the gradual, stratified and random sampling methods that were used, all 3 sub-samples are heterogeneous with regards their education and other socioeconomic characteristics. The student sample is representative of the total student population regarding the region, the type of the secondary school, the gender, and the grade of the students. The parent and the grandparent sub-samples followed the student sample, but they were not representative according to gender. The mean age (±SD)
of the students, parents, and grandparents were 15±3 years, 45±8 years, and 75±5 years, respectively.

The data were collected by questionnaires, which consisted of 3 open-ended, 16 multiple-choice, and 12 semantic differential scale questions. The latter were related to the motivational factors: the scoring scales provided respondents with 5 options to tick, with the middle point being the neutral answer. The following indices of motivation were constructed: to have fun, to relax, to meet people, to develop one’s personality, to improve health, to improve physical achievement. The reliability was measured by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (0.89). The answers given to the open-ended questions were categorized according to their frequency.

The students completed the questionnaires in the presence of the author during school time, and the parents and grandparents were subsequently given the questionnaires at home. The response rate was 100% for the students, 77.4% for the parents, and 65.5% for the grandparents.

The survey method was complemented by in-depth interviews (N=15), which were structured according to the age of the respondents, and the answers were categorized according to the type of the motivations (enjoyment or health prevention). The parents and grandparents were asked both about the attitudes and motivations that they have at the present time and those that they used to have at the age of 12-18 years, while students were asked only about the attitudes and motivations that they have at present.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS program for Microsoft Windows. In order to assess the motivation level for sport participation of the 3 generational groups at the present time and at the age of 12-18 years, a multivariate analysis (factor analysis) and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used where appropriate. Due to the high number of variables, a data reduction method (factor analysis) was used in order to cluster the variables according to their characteristics. The assumptions for using ANOVA were verified; normality by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and homogeneity of variance by Brown-Forsythe test. The Bonferroni post hoc tests were used to further indicate statistically significant differences between the 3 generational groups; the level of α=0.05 was considered significant.

Results

The data processing started with factor analysis to assess motivation for participation in sporting activity at the present time and at the age of 12-18 years. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index was 0.719 and 0.811, respectively, which is a satisfactory value allowing to continue with the Factor analysis. In both cases the motivations that have been examined were clustered into 2 factors: Joy Factor and Health Factor, the respective factor loadings were presented in Tables 1 and 2. Although the total variance explained by the two factors was relatively low in both analyses (52.3% and 50.0% for activities at present and the age of 12-18 years, respectively), only the 2 of them were included in the model since the eigenvalues were under 1 for other components. Moreover, the goal of the research emphasized parsimony, that is, to explain variance with as few factors as possible. In this case, the criterion for determining the value of as low as 50% can be regarded satisfactory and hence, the model with the 2 factors could be sufficient to be representative of the variables related to motivational issues.

Table 1. Factor loading of the 2 factors against the motivation degree for participation in sporting activity at the present time

| Items                           | Factors | Communality (h²) |
|---------------------------------|---------|-----------------|
|                                 | I       | II              |                  |
| **Joy Factor (a = 0.801)**      |         |                 |
| To have fun                     | 0.784   | 0.171           | 0.64             |
| To relax from day to day life   | 0.702   | 0.297           | 0.58             |
| To meet other people            | 0.633   | 0.205           | 0.44             |
| To develop my personality       | 0.582   | 0.129           | 0.35             |
| **Health Factor (a = 0.771)**   |         |                 |
| To improve health               | 0.145   | 0.989           | 0.99             |
| To improve physical performance | 0.493   | 0.560           | 0.55             |
| **Eigenvalue**                  |         |                 |
|                                 | 3.28    | 1.06            |
| **Percentage of variance explained** | 30.3   | 22.0            |
Table 2. Factor loading of the 2 factors against the motivation degree for participation in sporting activity at the age of 12-18 years

| Items                              | Factors | Communalities (h²) |
|------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|
|                                    | I       | II                 |
| Joy factor (a = 0.784)             |         |                    |
| To have fun                        | 0.703   | 0.192              |
| To relax from day to day life      | 0.670   | 0.350              |
| To meet other people               | 0.645   | 0.208              |
| To develop my personality          | 0.565   | 0.199              |
| Health factor (a = 0.808)          |         |                    |
| To improve health                  | 0.162   | 0.986              |
| To improve physical performance    | 0.486   | 0.606              |

Eigenvalue 3.37 0.98
Percentage of variance explained 28.2 23.8

The results of ANOVA are indicative of significant differences between the 3 generational groups concerning the Joy Factor ($F_{(2, 1064)} = 101.0, p<0.001$) as well as the Health Factor ($F_{(2, 1064)} = 4.77, p=0.01$) at the present time. The post hoc analyses revealed that students attained significantly ($p<0.001$) higher values of the Joy Factor as compared to both parents and grandparents; the differences being 0.42 and 0.52, respectively (Table 3). Regarding the Health Factor, the highest values (0.60) were observed in the grandparents – significantly ($p<0.001$) higher than in students (0.20) or parents (0.25).

Table 3. Results of ANOVA analyses (mean values ± SD in z scores): Differences between the 3 generational groups regarding Joy and Health factors at the present time

| Factor | Students (n = 741) | Parents (n = 229) | Grandparents (n = 97) |
|--------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Joy    | 0.75 ± 0.19       | 0.33 ± 0.21***   | 0.23 ± 0.21***        |
| Health | 0.20 ± 0.23       | 0.25 ± 0.25***   | 0.60 ± 0.23***        |

*** Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from students; Significantly different from parents. ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

Likewise, the present time, the Joy Factor ($F_{(2, 1064)} = 17.363, p<0.001$) and Health Factor ($F_{(2, 1064)} = 126.950, p<0.001$) at the age of 12-18 years proved to be significantly differentiated in the 3 generational groups. The post hoc analyses indicated that in the Joy Factor significant ($p<0.001$) differences exist between students (0.52) and two other groups, but not between parents (0.41) and grandparents (0.38). Regarding the Health Factor the value for grandparents (0.78) was significantly ($p<0.001$) higher than observed in the parents or students; the value observed in the latter group was the lowest (0.26) amongst the 3 generational groups.

Table 4. Results of ANOVA analyses (mean values ± SD in z scores): Differences between the 3 generational groups regarding Joy and Health factors at the age of 12-18 years

| Factor | Students (n = 741) | Parents (n = 229) | Grandparents (n = 97) |
|--------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Joy    | 0.52 ± 0.19       | 0.41 ± 0.23***   | 0.38 ± 0.22***        |
| Health | 0.26 ± 0.23       | 0.46 ± 0.26***   | 0.78 ± 0.23***        |

*** Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from students; ** Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from parents.

Discussion

Generational differences were seldom approached from scientific perspectives in Cyprus. They are lacking not only from sport-related literature but from the other areas of social sciences as well. As an exception, Zopiatis et al. [21] investigated occupational differences and similarities between two generations that are currently active in hospitality workplaces. The findings of this research helped some elements of the existing generational gaps in contemporary Cypriot society to be understood, but it could not be used as reference material for the results presented in this article. The only research found on 3 generations in international sport literature was published 4 decades ago. It analyzed the sporting habits of people living in a housing estate [14], so it can hardly serve as previous research.
for comparison. The perceived motivational differences can be discussed in a historical and cultural context and participation motivations with different age groups are taken into consideration.

The grandparents’ generation spent their childhood during the British colonial area. At that time, participation in modern sport was not a serious alternative for spending their leisure; they were more involved in traditional games and sports. Schools were not socializing agents for sport; most children had no early sport socialization in the current sense of the term. Besides, the prevailing traditional value system was puritan; enjoyment, fun and relaxation played much less importance in it as they did some decades later. All these reasons explain why the sporting motivations of the grandparents’ generations were different from the next generation, when they were 12-18 years old. They considered health enhancement as a stimulating factor in their childhood and youth, and they did not change their mind during their whole life cycle.

The circumstances for sport socialization changed when Cypriot sport developed and became institutionalized after the inland became independent from colonial rulers in 1960. The parents’ generation was growing up about that time. The children of this period received relatively more impulse for sport involvement, but this trend was interrupted when the Turkish forces invaded the inland and the country was separated in half. This historical event also had a decisive impact on the sporting values, attitudes, and motivations of Cypriot youth. Moreover, the value system in the Cypriot society was still traditional in the childhood of today’s parents; their parents (today’s grandparents) transmitted their puritan values and behavioral patterns in connection with sport. Consequently, in spite of the changing role of modern sport in society, today’s parents’ sporting motivations when they were aged 12-18 years did not differ significantly from their own parents’ motivations, that is, they regarded health enhancement as the most important reason to practice sport. Paradoxically, the prospect to have fun, to meet other people, and to relax stimulate today’s parents more to be involved in sport in their adulthood than it did in their childhood, as both sport and the Cypriot society have changed since then.

The members of the youngest generation, which consists of secondary school students, were brought up under entirely different social circumstances since as a result of globalization traditional social norms and values have been radically changing in Cyprus recently. Life-organizing values have also been modified, and motivations for gratification and filling one’s life with joy came to the forefront in various field of social life, including sport. The majority of today’s secondary school students who are interested in sport are not willing to work hard for achieving higher performance; rather, they regard it as a source of pleasure.

At the beginning, in the 1970s, research on participation motivations for sport focused on youth participation [6] and the work focused on constructs connected to the youngsters’ physical ability; the social aspects of motivations were not studied in detail [2]. The findings of these investigations show that among the multiple reasons for young peoples’ sport involvement to develop skill and fitness, to answer challenges, and to have fun can be found the most frequently. Later, from the latter half of the 1980s, when researchers’ interest also turned to the participation motivations of adults, it was discovered that their most often cited motives were different from the youngsters’ motives. Generally speaking, fun and enjoyment energize different types of sport involvement less frequently with adults than with young people.

Keeping in mind that the above-mentioned research examined the different generations’ participation motivations for sport separately and under different social, cultural and economic circumstances, little similarity and considerable differences can be observed. Similarity is reflected by the fact that today among the young people’s reasons for participating in sport fun and enjoyment play an outstanding role regardless of their nationality and they have a new concept on the meaning of sport [16]. There is a move towards adventure sports as a form of escaping or transcending the routines of life. Modern sport cannot be identified with competitive sport alone, but with a wide range of new sports called “sports modi,” such as fitness, adventure, and health sports. Alternative and extreme sports are becoming formal sports, although such classification is not absolute [3]. Youngsters in particular are looking for unconventional activities, such as snowboarding and in-line skating, in their quest to become or remain active without the interference of undue authority. The peer motivational climate is of great importance in sport participation [13]. Like worldwide, young participants in Cyprus are looking for alternative sports activities with central values such as: freedom, experience of excellent movements, and creating an own youth culture.

However, the similarities stop here. Two major differences are worth mentioning. First, even a few decades ago the most significant motivators of Cypriot youth for sport were not related to pleasure but to health prevention, and contrary to international trend, when they became adults they placed greater importance on fun and enjoyment through sport than they did in their youth. The second
main difference is related to the elderly’s motivation for exercising. The health factor is generally a significant participation motivation for sport involvement with this age group [7,10]. However, with the Cypriot old generation the emphasis was put mostly on physical health; in other studies mental and social health were also referred as the older people’s frequently cited motive. The Cypriot elderly seem not to be really aware of or interested in the beneficial impact of sport on their mental well-being. This statement is also supported by the contradictory results of a recent Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity [15], which on the one hand show Cyprus as a health-conscious country regarding individuals’ motivations for physical activity. On the other hand, in another chapter of the same study it is revealed that almost the half of the Cypriot population aged 15 years and over never plays sport or do it less than monthly, and Cyprus is one of the countries in the European Union where the sport participation of the 55+ age group decreases the fastest.

The particular characteristics of the historical and cultural circumstances in Cyprus allow the generalization of the conclusions only on a national level. The fact that there also are generational differences in motivations related to sporting behavior is probably universal but the elements of these differences can be dissimilar. In principle, some findings of this research could be relevant in those southern European states where traditional values and behavioral patterns have survived over a long period of time and the close family ties playing an outstanding role in early sport socialization loosened only recently as a consequence of globalization. In practice, not significant similarities can be observed because of the radical differences in their history and in the history if their sport. Unlike Cyprus the cited countries were not colonized, they were instead colonizers (e.g. Spain and Portugal). Besides, modern sport emerged much earlier in those countries. For instance Greece, the value system of which is the most similar to the Cypriot one, played a leading role in promoting the rise and the spread of the Olympic movement. Finally, all the considered counties are considerably larger than Cyprus, where daily life is usually more personal than in countries with large populations and the knowledge of other people's backgrounds and personalities might have a special impact on sport socialization throughout the life cycle. Notwithstanding, the question how the smallness of Cyprus and in connection with this the strong interpersonal networks as well as the closeness of the interpersonal relations do influence the participation motivations for sport is still open. This issue and the actual impact of the Cypriot people’s social and economic background on their motivations for participating in sport need further studies.

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