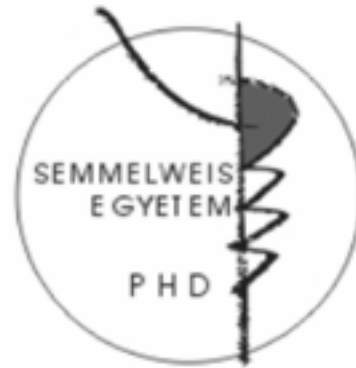


Extreme sport as a reaction of the postmodern hungarian society to the changes

Abstract of the PhD thesis

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Budapest
2013

1. INTRODUCTION

Curiosity, interest in novel things, creativity and extreme ideas have always attracted human beings throughout the course of history. It is enough to mention the flying structures or parachute plans of Leonardo da Vinci. But these extreme ideas could emerge in social sphere only in the 20th century. Several conditions had to be met so that extreme activities could “institutionalize” and evolve into popular extreme sports attracting wide masses.

On the one hand, science and technology had to be developed, on the other hand, new ideologies had to emerge. Besides new ideas, cultural, communicational and mediatized globalization helped to disseminate new values as well. Many scholars examined and disclosed the post-modern approach and the relating post-materialist values.

Hassan (1982) holds that the post-modern approach emphasizes the subject as a new value. Preuss-Lausitz (1997) adds that everything is relative and casual. In the post-modern age diversity and differentiation, pluralization and individualization influence existence at the same time. Schulze maintains in his theory about the experience-driven society that seeking a special way of life appreciated by the individual himself gets in the foreground (Éber, 2008). Inglehart thinks about post-modernity that the new ideology, accompanied with the right level of economic development, forms a new cultural environment, in which individuals can endorse new norms and values, while fulfilling new social roles. His scarcity hypothesis maintains that if the environmental context, in which world views and value orientations are developed, can be described by economic security and development, there will be a shift from modern/materialist values to post-modern/post-materialist values in the society’s value preferences (Inglehart, 1995, 1997).

The transition of regime in 1989, which triggered a series of changes, was a prerequisite for post-modernism gaining terrain and the shift to post-materialist values in Hungary. Due to the transformation of the political system, borders have collapsed literally and figuratively as well. As a consequence of social changes, official values of the ancient regime eroded leading to a shift, or as some researchers think, to a crisis of

values. Thanks to economic changes, there emerged a new (solvent) market demand that propagated new values and sought thrills through new activities. The macro-economic changes and social transitions influenced the individual value orientation as well. As new values became internalized, they changed the life style dominating so far, recreational and sports habits as a new drive of motivation.

As it can be seen today, more and more people in the Hungarian society come to the decision that they try themselves and even regularly pursuit extreme sports. But to practice extreme sports you need more than the desire for new, exciting and so far unknown experiences. Researchers try to find the reasons why extreme sports participants seek fear, danger and extreme conditions. While Zuckerman (1994) assumes that the reason is the high individual level of sensation seeking, Hayenhjelm (2006) draws the attention to the special circumstances of voluntary risk-taking. Jackson and Csíkszentmihályi (1999) put risks in the centre of attention and maintain that people can reach special experiences through risks.

In my thesis I intend to reveal the influence of macro-environmental changes on a large part of the Hungarian society taking advantage of the theoretical background mentioned above. My objective is to analyze the motivation and value orientation of people involved in extreme sports and to examine the influence of the values endorsed by participants on their life styles. I try to find the answer to the question: how do the value preferences of extreme sports participants differ from those of mainstream society and how much does their value orientation reflect post-modern values? My research is novel, as I examine several extreme sports, involvement in sports like this and their relations with human values, and this is the first time for such analysis to be done in Hungarian research.

2. OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of the present dissertation is to explore the motivational factors of a group of Hungarian extreme sports participants, to examine their value preferences, to analyze the position of values related to practicing sports in their value orientation and if the post-modern, experience-driven value approach of participants is reflected in their cultural consumption.

To attain my targets I conducted explorative research. In relation to the aforementioned objectives and empirical research, I have the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

I assume that:

1. Intrinsic motivation is more important for participants than external effects, which is reflected in the set order of values.
2. In the domain of sport's special target values, the value contents that relate to extreme sports dominate the orientation of participants.
3. The orientation of extreme sports participants primarily reflects values of post-modernism. Their orientations are dominated by high preferences for courage and risk-taking as these values are related mostly to extreme sports in society's perception.
4. Within the group of participants, those above 30, who were basically socialized in a materialist environment, have high preferences for materialist values while those below 30 tend to have high preferences for post-materialist values.
5. The post-modern, experience-driven value approach of extreme sports participants is reflected in their cultural consumption as well. They are attracted by topics that require a high level of sensational capacity, irrespective of the given medium.

3. METHODS

I selected nine branches of sport within the domain of extreme sports:

- skate-boarding, in-line skating
- mountain-biking
- caving
- wall climbing
- mountain- and rock climbing
- hang-gliding
- parachuting and paragliding
- white water rafting
- (free-lung) diving

For the selection I used snowball sampling, which is one of the most common techniques that are not based on probability. The sample is constructed of sport club members, people interviewed on trainings and competitions and their friends.

I applied questionnaires (N=443) for quantitative research, structured interviews (N=9) and participants' observation for qualitative research.

Data were processed in version 18 of SPSS. Pearson's chi-squared test and one-way analysis of variance were used in the analysis. The exploration and verification of value dimensions were done by factor analysis and the multi-variable models were tested by "stepwise" linear regression.

The analysis part is as follows:

1. basic distributions of extreme sports participants
2. relation of the value environment and social variables (gender, age, qualifications, profession)
3. examination of value dimensions
4. analysis of value dimensions through multi-variable statistical procedures

4. RESULTS

The basic analyses revealed some interesting findings that could emerge from possible errors of sampling but there might be some other reasons for them as well. Findings should be tested on a representative sample in the future.

Data reveal that males are much more represented in extreme sports than women, compared to traditional sports. If we accept this proportion for the global society of extreme sports participants, it definitely supports Héjjas' views (2006) about males trying to distinguish themselves in areas where they have biological advantages in the context of tendencies for gender equalization. This gives an explanation why there are more male than female participants. Regarding profession and qualifications, some categories are largely overrepresented in the sample. 60% of the respondents are employees or have higher education degree. Results, if proved, could support Lash (quoted by Wheaton, 2004), who thinks extreme sports are mainly preferred by white, middle-class males.

Evaluation of the results follow the objectives of the research and aims to test the hypotheses. First, the motivational structure of extreme sports participants, the frequency of their practice, then their value orientation structure and the influence preferred values exert on cultural consumption will be examined.

The motivational structure of extreme sports participants

One of the major questions in the focus of the study is what emotional or rational motives one can have to voluntarily take risks and pursue extreme sports in a dangerous setting. What factors influence the individual when they decide to practice some extreme sports which needs, in many cases, a large investment of time, energy and money. Findings show that in contrast with some researchers' statements (Bulcsy 2003, Szabó 2004, Neulinger 2007), participants are primarily motivated by intrinsic factors and not external influences.

As part of their motivation, both males and females intend to find the limits of their performance and courage. They also seek for friends, which means that a good community is indispensable in the world of extreme sports as well. A strong figure and attractive looks, which are some of the most important motivational factors for traditional athletes, are less inspiring for extreme sports participants.

Among external influences friends is the most important factor as most participants started to pursue sports on a friend's recommendation. Parents were the role models in their sports activities for a few participants. Advertisements that play a very important role in the case of oriental sports or fitness, are of very little importance to people involved in extreme sports, which is perhaps not a surprising fact as nobody would put their bodies at risk for reasons related to fashion or the influence of commercials.

Value structure of extreme sports participants

Sport is a special value as it represents objective value and instrumental value at the same time, since any special movement (as an objective) can only be achieved through sport. Sport with its physical and mental objective values, in other words "needs" or "motivational factors", result in an active and regular pursuit. Value orientation of extreme sports participants is principally characterised by values that are tightly linked to such sports. Values participants had the highest preferences for are "it improves performance" followed by "it develops willpower", "it helps to spend spare time in a useful way", "it improves coordination abilities" and "it boosts self-confidence". The value "it delivers a good form of body", which dominates the preferences of athletes in traditional sports took position 14 in a list of 18 items.

Intrinsic motives and the special objective values of sport forming a solid motivational base contribute to the regular pursuit of and persistence in sport. Research into extreme sports participants show that there is a substantive difference from the average people in society (Berkes 2006, Ifjúság 2008). 75% of males and 63% of females regularly pursue sport of some kind, which means at least 20 occasions a year in the present research. It must be, however, considered that regular involvement cannot be interpreted on the

same basis with traditional sports, some of which are pursued in a fitness room. Since most extreme sports can only be practised outdoor, besides the schedule of the peers weather and topography of the country also restrict the opportunities of pursuit.

Besides the typical sport-related values, sport conveys some moral, individual and community values as well. Rules teach participants discipline, honesty and a fair play, while the common objectives encourage cooperation, altruism and offering assistance to others.

Several value systems had their influence simultaneously at the end of the 20th century. As a consequence of the revolutionary changes, the eroding values of the old regime and the modern/materialist values of the market economy influenced broad masses at the same time (Beluszky 2000, Inglehart 1997), while more and more young people had post-modern/post-materialist orientations following new ideologies and social changes (Bauer 2002, Rácz 2005).

The shift in values can be very well traced in extreme sports participants' orientations if we examine the preference orders of values. Respondents had the highest preferences for honesty followed by health in a list of 28 items. Preferences for health-related values show the influence of new ideologies, which aim at a healthy way of life and sustainable development instead of orientation to mass consumption.

Private sphere values such as true friendship, love, inner harmony, a strong family are evenly distributed in the upper quartiles.

Post-materialist values show a more varied picture. While freedom is dominating preferences, creativity, a varied and interesting life took their positions in the middle of the order of value preferences. We may, perhaps, draw the conclusion that experience related to sports are not fully enough to meet participants' demands for a varied and interesting life, therefore, values such as motivations influence other segments of life as well. It is interesting to note that courage and risk-taking, which are most linked to involvement in extreme sports in society's perception, seem to be of very low

importance to participants. These results are worth considering as values like this are endorsed very much by the market principles of the 21st century. (Héjjas 2006) This phenomenon may support Rinehart's views (2003) on the differences of interpretation of courage and risks by extreme sports participants and society. Courage, risk-taking, even recklessness are pure means for participants to pursue dangerous activities.

Respondents in the survey had the lowest preferences for traditional values such as respect of traditions, religion, national pride or social order and materialist values such as aesthetics, wealth and richness or power and leadership. Reasons might be inherent in the experience-driven way of, which contradicts the take-what-you-have-been-given self-restricting attitude on the one hand and participants' openness and freedom-oriented value attitudes, which do not favour traditional values in a conservative approach.

Rejection of materialist values, compared to the attitude of the society, is supported by the fact that the participants' thrill-seeking attitudes and involvement in adventure sports place the emphasis on post-modern values in their value orientation structures.

Value dimensions of extreme sports participants

A factor analysis on the value systems of extreme sports participants reveals that there really is a latent structure of values in the background. 5 factors of 16 values are formed as a result of a data reduction procedure of the 6 groups of 28 values. Wealth or richness and power and leadership from materialist values and religion and national pride from traditional values remain in the model. Varied life experience, interesting life and creativity from post-materialist values are parts of the model as well. Following the results of the constructs, all the values of the private sphere are omitted from the model.

Values related to extreme sports contain a hidden structure, which result in the construction of two separate factors. Community values are comprised of honesty, solidarity, fair-play, responsibility, cooperation and assistance, while recklessness, risk-taking and courage in a new factor represent the group of challenge-related values.

The one-way analysis of variance into the influence of socio-demographic variables on factors show that age, profession and qualifications affect the preferences for challenge-related values. Age significantly influences preferences for post-materialist and profession preferences for community values. The analysis reveals that there are no fundamental differences between the preferences of males and females, and the social gender does not affect any of the value dimensions. None of the variables seem to have any impact on preferences for materialist and traditional values.

The relations between age, materialist and post-materialist values, which are in the focus of the present thesis, only partly support the findings of earlier studies. With the advance of age, people have lower preferences for materialist values (factor scores are 0.044 for people below 30; 0.003 for people between 30 and 40 and -0.051 for people above 40). This seems to contradict Inglehart's theories, which state that old people have a more materialist approach, compared to young people. This marks, again, an important difference between the value orientations of average people and extreme sports participants. Inglehart's scarcity hypothesis maintains that the subjective importance attributed to values is influenced by the relatively restricted access to them. The argument that participants might dispose of more material goods than average people in society and this is why they endorse less materialist values, is not likely.

Compared to the participants below 30, people between 30 and 40 seem to have higher preferences for post-materialist values, while people above 40, again, do not prefer such values. These findings only partly support Inglehart's results which say that with the advance of age, post-materialist values lose on their importance. They do not support the socialization hypothesis either, since extreme sports participants above 30 were mainly socialized in a social environment that cherished materialist values. We may draw the conclusions that value orientation changed "intra-generation" as a result of involvement in action sports and the post-modern values attributed to them, indicating that there has been a shift toward post-materialist values.

On the basis of the results of a multi-dimensional linear regression, only some of the value dimensions and independent variables have significant correlations. Age and

qualifications have opposite influence on preferences for post-materialist values and there is interaction between the two variables. While post-materialist values seem to lose importance to people with the advance of age, people with a higher education level tend to endorse more these values. Challenge-related values are mostly endorsed by people with relatively low qualifications, which means that education level has a negative effect on the preferences. Just like qualifications, profession and age exert negative effect. The higher education level someone has or the older they are, the lower preferences they report for challenge-related values.

The influence of experience-oriented value systems on cultural consumption

My results differ from those of the findings of earlier research conducted in Hungary and underpin the following idea: if someone is active in one segment of culture, they will be more active in other areas of culture too. (Vitányi, 2005)

Cultural demand had a decreasing tendency in Hungary at the end of the 20th century (Falussy 1993, Bauer-Tibori 2002, Tibori 2001) in spite of the fact that more skills and cultural values are required on a diminishing labour market and people have much more spare time. This is a gloom picture because it is not only the older generations but young people as well who do not consume culture. Activities that require little intellectual, physical and financial expenditure are preferred.

The most distinct characteristics of extreme sports participants' everyday routine is that only 40% of them watch TV on an everyday basis, compared to the 90% of average people. Participants show a high level of community activities too. Almost 40% of them meet their friends every day, which indicates that social life is very important to them. On the basis of my findings, I may assume that extreme sports participants are less threatened with loneliness during their lives.

Regarding the visits at cultural intermediary institutes, results are not so positive though still more favourable than for global society. 60% of respondents never attend a classical music concert, 24% of them never watch theatre plays and 15% of them never

visit an exhibition. These frequencies, however, are still higher than those of the Hungarian society whose non-attendance is radical with 88%, 65% and 70% of them never participating in such events. (Tibori, 2004) Comparison shows that while the majority of society still places the emphasis on the acquisition of things and care less about community values, extreme sports participants have a higher demand for social happenings and entertainment, which indicates sport has an important power of community value transfer.

Extreme sports participants have special mentality and power to establish communities and transfer values, which can be traced in other areas as well. As findings show, orientation to experience is the major call in the cultural consumption habits of participants. This orientation is not about seeking for hedonist pleasures but about seeking for meaningful social relations and having varied and interesting life experience. This theory is very much supported by the order of preferred topics. Topics that provide a “real-time” connection to the world and continuous interaction with friends and peers are more preferred than themes of a relatively high sensation capacity such as thrillers, horrors or topics with sex content.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In my thesis I attempted to explore the motivational basis and value orientation of a group of extreme sports participants in Hungary and find the answer to the question if extreme sports are a recreation to the global and local social changes of the past 20 years. Drawing a comprehensive picture was not possible without the multi-aspectual examination of the theme. Therefore, my research objectives included not only the examination of general human values but mapping the inherent and special values of sports as well. While considering the motivating and influencing power of values transferred by sports, my principal aims were completed with the intention of exploring participants' recreation habits and trying to deliver a more comprehensive picture of value attitudes of Hungarian extreme sports participants.

Regarding my initial hypotheses, the following conclusions can be drawn.

My **first** assumption that intrinsic motivation is more important than external effects to participants, which is reflected in the reported order of values, was **confirmed**.

Finding the limits of one's own performance and courage, belonging to a community and leading a healthy way of life are very important factors, while external effects (parent-model, advertisement, fashion etc.) are less inspiring. The difference in influence is reflected in the reported order of external/intrinsic motivational factors.

My **second** assumption that participants have high preferences for values of the special and inherent values of sports that are in relation with extreme sports, was also **confirmed**.

In the first places of the special objective values of sports there are values such as "it improves performance", "it develops willpower", "it improves coordination abilities" and "it boosts self-confidence", which are tightly linked to extreme sports.

My **third** assumption that extreme sports participants principally endorse the values of the post-modern age with a highlight on courage and risk-taking was **only partly confirmed**.

My findings confirmed the first part of the hypothesis about participants representing the values generally preferred in the post-modern age. *Their value hierarchy is led by community values such as assistance or responsibility, and they cherish values that adequately associate with their aspirations (creativity, varied life experiences, interesting life).*

The part of my assumption which referred to the domination of courage and risk-taking (values that are most tightly linked to extreme sports in society's perception) in the value orientation of extreme sports participants was not confirmed. Results indicate that while society still considers *courage and risk-taking to be the most important values of people involved in extreme sports, participants themselves reported very low preferences for these values.*

My **fourth** assumption, which predicted that people above 30 who were mainly socialised in an environment dominated by materialist values would prefer materialist values, while those below 30 would adopt a rather post-materialist approach, **was partly confirmed**.

The part of the hypothesis referring to *the post-materialist value preferences of people below 30* was confirmed. The second part of the hypothesis, however, has to be rejected on the basis of my findings. *Participants have lower and lower preferences for materialist values with the advance of age.* These results seem to contradict both Inglehart's scarcity and socialization hypotheses. They confirm the views about post-materialist values playing a special role in the value orientation of participants through the values conveyed by sport, which could lead to a shift in values intra-generation.

My **fifth** assumption about the experience-oriented approach of participants influencing their cultural consumption habits and topics with a high sensational capacity, independently of the medium, being more interesting to them **was only partly confirmed**.

Findings confirmed the part of the hypothesis that stated that participants visited the traditional cultural intermediary institutes more frequently than average people did, which proved that their sensation seeking attitude did not restrict to the thrills accessible in extreme sports. The other part of the hypothesis about *participants being more interested in topics with a high sensational capacity independently of the medium proved to be completely fault*. While sci-fi, thriller, sex or horror seem to be attractive topics to overall society, they are not really endorsed by extreme sports participants.

In my thesis I attempted to explore the value orientation of a group of extreme sports participants in Hungary and find the answer to the question if their value hierarchies are a reaction to the global and local social changes of the past 20 years. Drawing a comprehensive picture was not possible without the multi-aspectual examination of the topic. Therefore, my research objectives included not only the examination of general human values but mapping the inherent and special values of sports as well.

Results show that there is a tight significant connection between involvement in extreme sports and the value socialization of the participants.

My thesis was based on explorative research. Processed data and findings can contribute to other explorative and/or representative research in the future.

Representative research could confirm the findings which seem to have parallel conclusions with international research, that is, people involved in extreme sports are basically between 30 and 40, have a relatively high level of qualifications, with entrepreneurs being overrepresented regarding participants' professions.

Some representative research could also confirm and further develop my views on value attitude and value orientation of participants.

The value orientation of people pursuing technical sports (e.g. moto-cross, rally, jet-ski) in Hungary could be revealed in an explorative study.

Further research might be conducted into extreme sports as addictions of the people involved.

6. PUBLICATIONS

by the author on the topic of the thesis

Pólusné Thiry É. (2013) Élmény vagy gazdagság – az extrém sportolók élményorientációja. *Magyar Sporttudományi Szemle*, 14, (53):35-39.

Pólus-Thiry É, Rédei Cs. (2012) Value orientation of people involved in action or extreme sports in Hungary, *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 9, (1+2): 105-117.

Pólus-Thiry É, Rédei Cs. (2012) The Influence of Age and Gender on the Value Orientation of Extreme Sports Participants, *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, 56: 51-58.

Pólusné Thiry É. (2011) Extrém sportok szelekciós modelljei: motivációk és választások az élménytársadalmakban. *Magyar Sporttudományi Szemle*, 12, (45): 16-20.

Pólusné Thiry É. (2010) Az extrém sportok morfológiája történeti fejlődésük tükrében. *Kalokagathia*, 47-48, (4-1): 127-139.