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# EXAMINATION OF LEISURE SPORTS ALTERNATIVES PROVIDED BY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:** *It is one of the main duties of sports in higher education to provide health conscious and sports-loving managers to the society. University years are a good opportunity to do sports in an organised framework, as well as lifestyle consultancy and to make use of the preventive function of sports. In this environment, the approach of students can still be shaped within a formal framework and their level of interest towards sports can still be increased. Furthermore, they can be motivated and become committed to sports if they have positive experiences. The aim of my analysis is to explore and describe the characteristics, peculiarities and current situation of higher education leisure sports. In this study, I present the results of the analysis of data collected with the first eight questions of the situation assessment part of the questionnaire survey. More specifically, I examined the evaluation of leisure sports activities, free sports opportunities and the branches of sports in which these are provided. I was also looking to find out where these sports opportunities are available for students inside or outside the institution and who they are organised and managed by. At the same time, I examined sports opportunities whose costs are paid by the student and analysed which branches of sports are available. Based on my results, I concluded that the sports opportunities of students are especially good according to the managers. This statement confronts the research findings which suggest that the sports activity of students is very low.*

**Keywords:** *university, sports managers, leisure sports*  
(JEL code: Z20)

## Introduction

Theoretically, competitive sports and leisure sports can be distinguished in the sports life of a community, a country, or a society, but in reality, these two areas are closely linked to each other. In the long run, competitive sports cannot be successful without leisure sports done by massive amounts of people, while the achievements of the best athletes of a nation in various world competitions could be a pull factor for those doing leisure sports. In the vision of an ideal sports nation, the youngsters who get to know the experience of sports and are given the opportunity to develop their skills are at the bottom of an imaginary pyramid. Top athletes are selected from these youngsters at the end of a lengthy selection process. Young people who continue to do sports as adults because they love sports and in order to benefit from the favourable effects of doing sports will also raise their children in this spirit. This system can be maintained if those falling out of competitive sports will still continue to do sports and become leisure sportsmen. For this reason, it is the fundamental duty of sports policy at all times to broaden the bottom of this pyramid and to guide the widest possible range of those falling out of competitive sports during the selection process

to leisure sports.

It is one of the main duties of sports in higher education to provide health conscious and sports-loving managers to the society. University years are a good opportunity to do sports in an organised framework, as well as lifestyle consultancy and to make use of the preventive function of sports.

Higher education mass sports and leisure sports are outstanding opportunities to shape the sports focus of higher education students, as well as their attitude towards sports; i.e., their positive evaluation and approach regarding sports. In this environment, the approach of students can still be shaped within a formal framework and their level of interest towards sports can still be increased. Furthermore, they can be motivated and become committed to sports if they have positive experiences. Higher education is basically a last chance to develop conscious, organised sports values and establish a similar socialisation environment for students. This is a dual impact due to the improved quality of life of students who were socialised this way and do sports, while there is also a multiplicative effect in that the leading intellectual class of the future has a key role in raising the generations to come and shaping their views, which is even more important than the former element. The government realised the significance of

this aspect when they introduced programs such as the Alfréd Hajós Plan in 2012, which can be regarded as the official sports program of higher education and it lays great emphasis on promoting leisure sports by launching various programs. It is one of the key objectives of this program to double the number of students who regularly do sports.

One of the components of the TÁMOP project entitled "Sports in higher education" focuses on the development of sports services provided by institutions within the framework of student services. It is one of the main purposes of the project to establish an integrated sports office with the primary aim to increase the number of students engaged in leisure sports, focusing on students who have not taken part in sports programs and championships.

The aim of my doctoral research is to explore the situation of higher education leisure sports and to accordingly examine the areas to be developed, as well as the fundamental concepts which the sports managers of higher education consider to be important. I perform multilateral data collection in the course of examining this topic. The target group of my survey is the affected group itself, i.e. students, but I extended my analyses to the managers dealing with the organisation of leisure sports. This paper presents the situation assessment research findings obtained as a result of the survey conducted among the sports centre and sports office managers in higher education institutions.

## 1. Material and methods

Based on previous research, a high percentage of competitive sportsmen in higher education institutions participate in university sports life as leisure sportsmen and the main aspect of regular physical activities is easy access (Szabó 2006 and Neulinger 2007). For this reason, providing university-organised leisure sports alternatives in as many branches of sports as possible is of chief importance.

I conducted the examinations with own-constructed printed questionnaires. The standardised questionnaire contained 29 closed and open questions which were classified into three main groups. Questions in the first group focused on the leisure sports opportunities of institutions and the related financing issues, the second group of questions were dealing with the development alternatives of higher education leisure sports activities, while the third group contained questions about the socio-demographic data of sports managers. Respondents answered to open questions freely with their own words. As for closed questions, respondents could choose from previously provided alternatives. Questionnaires were filled out in writing, followed by personal negotiation. Questionnaires were filled out voluntarily. Due to the length constraints of this study, only the results of the situation analysis, i.e., the first group of questions are presented.

My comparative analysis covers 18 higher education institutions. The sports centre and sports office managers and head trainers of these institutions filled out the questionnaire about the leisure sports organising opportunities and background. The questionnaires were filled out during the

further education programme for sports managers organised at the University of Debrecen on 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> October 2014. The research sample is constituted by the 42 sports managers (Table 1) who took part in the further education training and answered the questions in the questionnaire. No exclusion criteria were used.

Table 1. Sample description

Gender		Higher Education Institutions in Budapest	Higher Education Institutions Outside the Capital
Male	28 Ppl	9 Ppl	19 Ppl
Female	14 Ppl	3 Ppl	11 Ppl
Total	42 Ppl	12 Ppl	30 Ppl

Source: own construction

Currently, there are 69 active higher education institutions in Hungary, of which 29 are state financed, 15 are funded by foundations and 25 are financed by churches. Of the total 240 000 students, nearly 200 000 full-time students study at the higher education institutions represented by the interviewed managers. Therefore, the sports managers of higher education institutions with high student numbers participated in the survey and data collection. Sports managers of 18 out of the 29 state-run higher education institutions (62%) responded to the questions in the questionnaire. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the 42-person-sample per institution and the student number of the given institution.

Table 2. Number of managers and full-time students of the examined higher education institutions

Higher education institutions	Number of people taking part in the survey	Number of full-time students (rounded)
1. Corvinus University of Budapest	1 person	13 000 people
2. Budapest Business School	2 people	13 000 people
3. Budapest University of Technology and Economics	2 people	20 500 people
4. University of Debrecen	4 people	24 500 people
5. College of Dunaújváros	3 people	1900 people
6. Eötvös József College	2 people	700 people
7. Eötvös Lóránd University	3 people	23 500 people
8. Eszterházy Károly College	3 people	4200 people
9. University of Miskolc	3 people	8300 people
10. College of Nyíregyháza	3 people	3500 people
11. University of Western Hungary	3 people	7700 people
12. Óbuda University	2 people	8000 people
13. University of Pannonia	1 person	6500 people
14. University of Pécs	3 people	18600 people
15. Semmelweis University	1 person	9500 people
16. Széchenyi István University	2 people	7500 people
17. University of Szeged	3 people	21 000 people
18. Szent István University	1 person	9800 people
<b>Total:</b>	<b>42 people</b>	<b>201 700 people</b>

Source: own construction

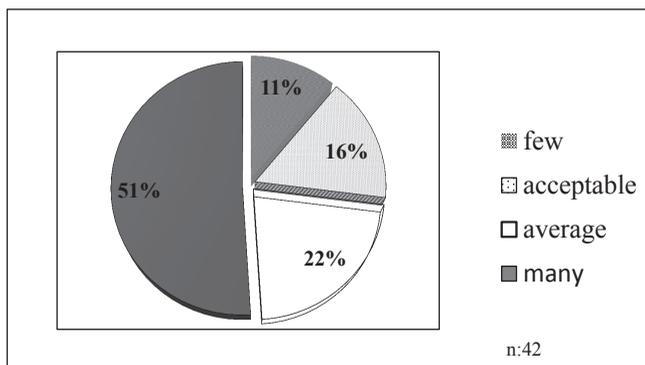
It can be seen from the data that the higher education institutions which participated in the survey represent 83% of the total number of full-time students. This proportion gives a proper overview of the situation of leisure sports. University sports managers took part in data collection; therefore, the ratings definitely represent managerial judgment. As regards the distribution of managers per workplace, the responses were obtained from sports managers of six universities in Budapest and twelve universities outside the capital. The sample represents the main Hungarian higher education institutions and more than four fifths of the higher education student population.

## 2. Results

The main objective of examining the opportunities of doing leisure sports was to explore the sports activities which are properly facilitated in the given institutions.

Furthermore, I examined how satisfied the interviewed sports managers are with these opportunities. The opportunities of higher education leisure sports services were rated on a scale from 1 to 4. The majority (51%) of the managers of the examined higher education institutions rated students' opportunities to do leisure sports (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Managers' evaluation of students' leisure sports opportunities



Source: own construction

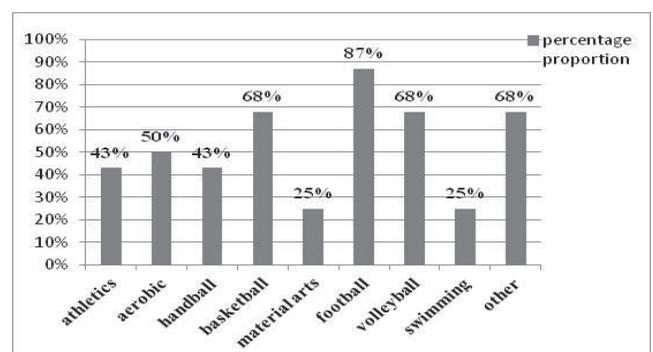
The opinions of managers tend to be positive, 89% of them considered students' leisure sports opportunities acceptable or even better. Only 11% of them considered leisure sports alternatives to be few. This rating was provided by the sports managers of universities in Budapest.

The large sample research called "Ifjúság" (meaning "youth") (Ádám et al.2013) which is performed every four years focuses on the age group between 15-29 from the aspect of their approach to sports, among others. The research conducted in 2012 revealed that 35% of youngsters reported that they were regularly doing sports in addition to the obligatory physical education courses. The research results in 2008 also show that the physical activity of youngsters decreases from year to year. Today's youngsters stop doing regular physical training earlier than younger generations. They start giving up regular physical exercises during their high school years. 34% of those between 20-24 years of age and 29% of respondents between 25-29 were physically active

in 2012 (Ádám et al. 2013). These published findings seem to be in contradiction with the judgment of sports opportunities, as four fifths of managers considered them to be average or better. Therefore, according to the evaluation of sports managers, the amount of leisure sports programs provided by higher education institutions is acceptable, but technical literature data show decreasing number of students doing sports. This problem calls for further research as it is also necessary to examine the topic from the aspect of students. It is probable that students' leisure sports habits are also changing. Exploring these habits in the exact age group is also a part of my doctoral research program.

I examined whether there are free organised leisure sports opportunities in higher education institutions with a simple yes/no question and I also probed for the branches of sports (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Free leisure sports opportunities in the examined higher education institutions



Source: own construction

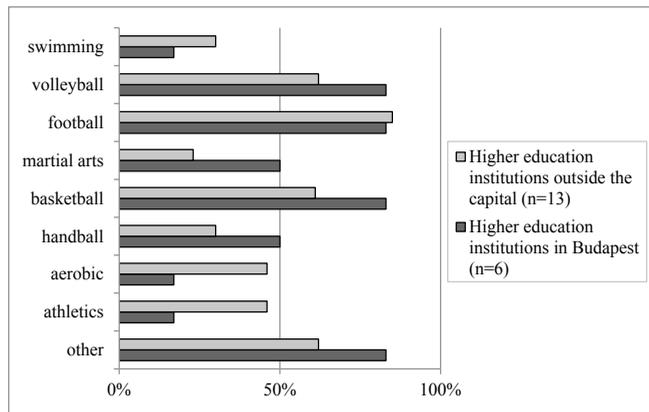
With one exception, the representatives of the interviewed universities responded that there were free organised leisure sports activities.

Based on the obtained results, football is provided in the highest percentage (87%) in most institutions. The research of Szabó (2006), Szonda Ipsos (2003) and Neulinger (2007) also show that football is students' most preferred branch of team sports, most of them regularly do this type of sports during their university years. Football is a branch of sports whose location can be provided both outdoors and indoors. In the case of outdoor football, artificial grass fields made this type of sports opportunity to be even more easily accessible. As a matter of course, all other team games (basketball, volleyball) are provided in a significant proportion of higher education institutions. These institutions provide sports opportunities in the branches of sports which attract many people. Swimming and martial arts have the lowest proportion among the various alternatives. Swimming calls for a certain infrastructural background which few higher education institutions have. Individual leisure sports opportunities are provided to a lesser extent, only aerobics are provided by every second higher education institution. The "other" free sports opportunities show a wide scale. Several higher education institutions provide their students with opportunities of pilates, yoga, floorball, indoor climbing, tennis, table tennis and badminton. Table tennis was mentioned by the representatives of three higher education institutions, while the other branches of sports were referred to

by one institution manager each. During a previously performed survey among research universities, I concluded (Pfau 2012) that the appearance of project grants improved the free sports opportunities for students which could have a positive impact on students' habits of doing sports.

The performed data collection made it possible to evaluate universities both in Budapest and outside Budapest and various analyses could be conducted based on this distinction. Therefore, I had the chance to compare sports opportunities in universities in the capital and those outside the capital (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Free leisure sports opportunities in higher education institutions in Budapest and outside the capital



Source: own construction

There is a marked difference in athletics and aerobics which were represented to a higher extent among the free sports opportunities provided by universities outside the capital. On the contrary, martial arts can be performed in 50% of higher education institutions in the capital. 83% of sports managers of higher education institutions in the capital mentioned "other" sports opportunities, while this proportion was 62% in the case of managers in institutions outside the capital. These branches of sports provide multiple opportunities for students in Budapest campuses, as opposed to those outside the capital. It is probable that these differences are also due to infrastructural background, since every institution has different facilities.

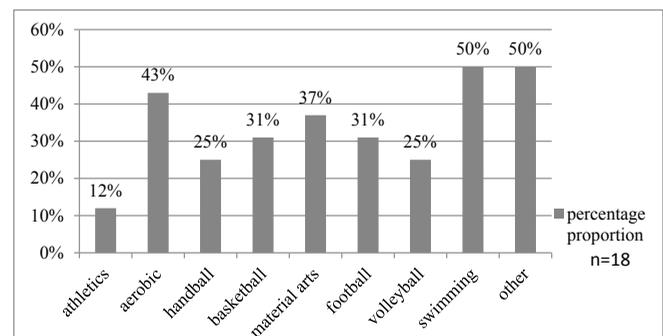
I examined where free leisure sports activities are provided inside or outside the campuses of higher education institutions. The students of higher education institutions who took part in the survey were able to live an active sports life both inside and outside the campus, but physical activities inside the campus were more frequent (74%). This finding is also supported by surveys conducted among students which resulted in the conclusion that easily accessible leisure sports opportunities are the most attractive (Szabó 2006). Leisure sports can be done within the campus of all examined higher education institutions in Budapest, while there was only one institution which provides free sports opportunities outside the campus. Of the twelve higher education institutions outside the capital, 91% provides opportunities to perform leisure sports within their campuses and 25% outside the university campus.

In a separate question, I examined the organisations and persons in connection with the higher education institutions

that take part in organising and supervising free leisure sports activities. Based on my examinations performed at six research universities (Pfau 2012), the physical education teachers, the student self-government (HÖK) and associations related to the university take care of organisation tasks. According to the responses of the interviewed managers, the organisation duties of free sports opportunities are performed by physical education teachers, the representatives of the student self-government, the sports office and various associations. However, there are higher education institutions where leisure sports are organised entirely by the student self-government. Self-government members responsible for sports are in direct connection with students; therefore, they can assess student needs sooner than sports managers or physical education teachers. The sports office is a new organisational form with its main duty to organise leisure sports for students. Student self-governments play an active role in the life of sports offices as they help with organising and assessing student needs. A sports office manages the leisure sports services in higher education institutions in cooperation with the manager of the sports centre and the physical education teachers.

I also wanted to know whether leisure sports opportunities whose costs are paid by students are available in higher education institutions (Figure 4). Four institutions do not provide such services.

Figure 4. Student-financed leisure sports opportunities in the examined higher education institutions



Source: own construction

In the other universities, swimming, aerobics and body building (others) are available to students to the highest proportion. The optional branches of sports are costly in terms of the necessary facilities, sports equipment or the trainer. Body building in fitness rooms can only be performed in a student-financed form, since these sports equipment have maintenance and renovation costs. Team sports are provided by every higher education institution as a free service; therefore, their percentage proportion is much lower. The percentage proportion increased mostly in the case of individual sports.

Based on research performed among students (Szabó 2006; Kovács 2011), leisure sports are becoming more individual, which puts the emphasis on individual sports, especially in the case of women. According to the responses of the interviewed sports managers, it can be concluded that the leisure sports organisers of various higher education institutions take these

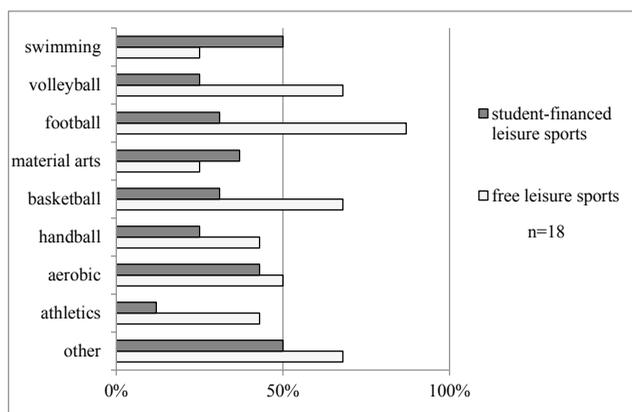
needs into consideration and these branches of sports are available to students.

There are branches of sports in the “others” category which became popular during the recent years among leisure sports (floorball, dragon boating, squash, tennis, indoor climbing, dynamic yoga).

Based on the comparison of free and student-financed leisure sports opportunities (Figure 5), it can be concluded that 50% of institutions can provide swimming only in a student-financed form, the main reason for which lies in the infrastructure of higher education institutions. Only a few universities have their own swimming pool; therefore, financial contribution is necessary to provide these sports.

Despite the fact that football is the most general freely available branch of sports, there is still a need for organising student-financed championships and programs.

Figure 5. Percentage proportion of free and student-financed leisure sports activities in the examined higher education institutions



Source: own construction

Those who wish to do individual sports can perform martial arts mostly in a student-financed form, one of the reasons for which is that few of the full-time physical education teachers of these higher education institutions deal with the various forms of martial arts; therefore, new teachers have to be employed which is costly.

The various forms of aerobics show similar distribution between free (50%) and student-financed (43%) forms. Based on various research findings (Neulinger 2007 and Szabó 2006), aerobics are the most popular form of physical activities among women. Therefore, providing the opportunity of aerobics could contribute to increasing the number of students taking part in leisure sports. For this reason, it is important to provide easy access to this branch of sports in an organised framework. Higher education institutions can provide the various forms of athletics for free, as they can be performed outdoors without any facilities.

## Summary

I interviewed sports managers to examine the current situation and organisation of leisure sports activities in higher education

institutions, as well as the various development possibilities. In this study, I present the results of the analysis of data collected with the first eight questions of the situation assessment part of the questionnaire survey put together by me. More specifically, I examined the evaluation of leisure sports activities, free sports opportunities and the branches of sports in which these are provided. I was also looking to find out where these sports opportunities are available for students inside or outside the institution and who they are organised and managed by.

At the same time, I examined sports opportunities whose costs are paid by the student and analysed the distribution of the various branches of sports. Based on my results, I concluded that the sports opportunities of students are especially good according to the managers. This statement confronts the research findings which suggest that the sports activity of students is very low. I will clarify this contradiction in a subsequent research. I concluded that the leisure sports opportunities provided by universities in Budapest and outside the capital are differentiated depending on the infrastructural background and sports traditions. The comparison of free and student-financed sports also resulted in differences, the fundamental reasons for which possibly lie in infrastructural backgrounds and physical education teachers' preference of a given branch of sports. Based on the percentage distribution, higher education institutions tend to provide free access to team sports, while individual sports can be performed in a student-financed way. New branches of sports also appear among university leisure sports, thereby trying to meet students' demands.

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