

The interest for the masters swimming competitions in 2010 – the managerial perspective. A case study: Timișoara

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Abstract

Masters swimmers are adults that systematically practise this sportive activity as amateurs in an organized environment. They have very different sportive abilities and their interest for practising swimming is linked to the benefits of this type of activity. In relation to the public perception existing in Romania, both in the mainstream public and in the specialists' circle, the competitive dimension is the most visible as opposed to the other forms of masters swimming: fitness swimming, recreational swimming, therapeutic swimming etc. The Timișoara Masters Swimming Club, which came into being in 2007, is the first club dedicated to masters swimming in our country. Its primary objective is to promote the practice of swimming by adults. The club's image and, implicitly, its marketing and, respectively, its financial management are influenced to a significant extent by the results achieved in masters swimming competitions. In this sense, statistics show that in 2010, compared to the precedent year, all the measurement indicators of the club's participation in competitions have decreased. The present paper focuses on the development of this amateur sportive movement by optimizing the organizational management in the sportive environment. The purpose of this paper is to identify the causes that have determined the decreasing tendencies of the Timișoara club members' participation and, respectively, of the results achieved in masters swimming competitions in 2010 as opposed to 2009.

Key words: *masters swimming, competition, interest, purpose, participation.*

Rezumat

Inotătorii masters sunt adulți care practică sistematic această activitate sportivă ca amatori, într-un cadru organizat. Aceștia au abilități sportive foarte diferite, interesul pentru practicarea înotului fiind legat de beneficiile acestui tip de activitate. În raport cu percepția publică existentă în România, atât la nivelul publicului larg, cât și al specialiștilor, dimensiunea competițională este cea mai vizibilă în raport cu celelalte forme ale înotului masters: înotul de fitness, de agrement, terapeutic etc. Clubul de Înot Masters Timișoara, înființat în anul 2007, este primul club dedicat înotului masters din țara noastră, obiectivul principal al clubului fiind promovarea practicării înotului de către adulți. Imaginea clubului și, implicit, marketingul acestuia, respectiv, managementul financiar al clubului sunt influențate în mare măsură de rezultatele obținute de club la competițiile de înot masters. În acest sens, statisticile arată că în 2010, în comparație cu anul precedent, toți indicatorii de măsurare a participării

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clubului la competiții au scăzut. Prezenta lucrare urmărește dezvoltarea mișcării sportive de amatori prin optimizarea managementului organizațional în mediul sportiv. Scopul lucrării este de a identifica cauzele ce au determinat tendința de descreștere a participării membrilor clubului din Timișoara și, respectiv, a rezultatelor obținute la competițiile de înot masters în 2010 față de 2009.

Cuvinte cheie: *înot masters, competiție, interes, motiv, participare.*

The present paper depicts the development of the amateur sportive movement through optimizing the organizational management in the sportive medium. According to research conducted on a European level (Euro barometer) in 2010, 69% of Romanian adults do not regularly conduct sportive activities [1], the European average in this case being situated at 25% [2]. Basically, in this hierarchy, Romania is on one of the last places in Europe. In this sense, the authors approach just one aspect from the total number of issues of practising sportive activities by amateurs and approach a less active target group and, implicitly, less visible in Romania: adults practising swimming. The way in which the positioning of the masters swimmers (versus the participation in competition) influences the management of a masters swimming club is analyzed in this paper.

General information

a) General context

Masters swimmers are adults that systematically practise this sportive activity as amateurs in an organized environment [3]. For the masters sportive movement, participation itself is more important even than sportive performance. According to the diversity of motivation of those practising it, for the present case there are many forms of practising masters swimming: competitive swimming, fitness swimming, recreational swimming, therapeutic swimming etc.

The training frequency and, respectively, the training methodology are left to the decision of each member, given the fact that the majority of the clubs do not have a coach.

In the case of the competitive masters swimming, the practitioners compete in age groups: 25-29, 30-34, 35-39 and so on, within 5 year categories. The last category includes any age above 100.

On a world level, the masters swimming movement has a history of over 30 years [4] and implies hundreds of thousands of practitioners.

Because masters swimming has a very short history in our country [5] (in Romania there are only a few masters swimming competitions), the consistent majority of the Romanian participations in this type of competitions [6], is connected to the specific competitions organized in Hungary. In this context, it should be mentioned that the participation fee, as well as other participation spending (accommodation, meals etc.) have remained constant.

b) Organization

The MASTERS swimming club Timisoara [7] – CIMT is an NGO that reunites people over the age of 18 that share the hobby of swimming, but also have very different ways of swimming. Among them there are former professional swimmers, but also people that have never practised competitive swimming. The initiative promotes the practice of sportive activities by adults as amateurs, aiming to maintain a state of health and to improve the practitioners' sportive abilities.

The club self sustains itself financially. The membership fee represents the main source of financing. Moreover, the members' participation in competitions is voluntary and represents a personal additional spending, besides the monthly membership fee.

Currently, around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the club members have not practised performance swimming and the tendency (the amount of the individual subvention increases in stages together with the number of tasks per competition session in which the member takes part in) has been imposed at a club level.

c) Local context

In Timisoara, there is only one swimming pool that has costly entrance fees in regard to the Romanian average income. This pool is property of the local council and the sports clubs gain access to it via colour renting, which is conditioned by gaining sportive performances.

The problem: in regard to the existing public perception in Romania, both in the public mainstream, as well as in the circle of specialists, the competitive dimension is more visible as opposed to other forms of masters swimming: fitness swimming, recreational swimming, therapeutic swimming etc. This is why the image of the club and, implicitly, its marketing and financial management, respectively, are influenced to a significant extent by the results gained by the club in masters swimming competitions. In this sense, *the statistics show that in 2010, compared to the previous year, all the indicators that measure the participation of the club in competitions have decreased.*

In order to find solutions to the given problem, a qualitative research has been conducted within the target group, aiming to define personal perception regarding the causes of the problem. The purpose of

present since the club constitution (15th June 2007) is that the number of former professional performance swimmers is decreasing with the increase in the number of members.

In this context, beginning with the year 2010, for the stimulation of members taking part in competition, a policy of tax subsidy policy [8], proportional with the increase of the members' competitive engagement the research: to identify the causes that have determined a decreasing tendency of the participation of the Timișoara club members and, respectively, of the results achieved in the masters swimming competitions in 2010, as opposed to 2009 (Table I).

The method used: research on a questionnaire sent through electronic mail to all the members of the club registered on the club's discussion electronic list.

The number of electronic mail addresses registered at the moment of research: 79. Given the small size of the target group, it has not been necessary to define a sample group. The research has been conducted at the level of the whole group.

The questionnaire is divided into branches according to the following factors:

- According to the participation in at least one masters swimming competition (regardless when), there is the possibility of a yes/no answer. Each branch is followed separately to determine personal motivation regarding the analyzed situation.
- In the case of a positive answer, according to the participation in at least one competition in the year 2010, there is the possibility of a yes/no answer. Each sub-branch is followed separately to determine personal motivation regarding the analyzed situation.

24 people responded and the rate of answer was 30.4% respectively. In Figure 1 the distribution of the respondents is presented, according to gender:

It can be observed that the two genders correspond to the structure by gender of the club members (respectively, 1/3 female and 2/3 male).

The respondents' distribution on age groups is depicted in Figure 2. *One can assume that the higher rates of the middle-aged respondents reflect both the members' structure in age groups, as well as the less developed electronic communication habits in the case of older members.*

Table I. The contrastive perspective regarding the CIMT members' participation in masters swimming competition

Parameter	[units of measurement]	Values 2010	Values 2009	Absolute values "2010"- "2009"	Percentage values "2010"- "2009"
Total number of participants per year (regardless of the number of individual participations/competition)	participants	139	147	-8	-5.44%
Total number of participations in the individual tasks (regardless of the number of individual participations/competition)	Individual tasks/year	364	431	-67	-15.55%
Total number of participations in collective tasks (relay race)	Collective tasks/year	32	38	-6	-15.79%
Annual average of participants/competition	Participants/competition	8.18	9.19	-1.01	-11.00%
Annual average of the number of individual tasks/competition	Tasks/competition	21.41	26.94	-5.53	-20.51%
Annual average of a person's participation in individual tasks/competition	Tasks/competition	2.62	2.93	-0.31	-10.68%
Annual average of the awarded places in individual tasks/competition	Awarded places/competition	17.24	22.13	-4.89	-22.08%
Annual average of the awarded places in individual tasks/participation	Awarded places / participation	0.8	0.82	-0.02	-2.00%
Annual average of the awarded places in individual tasks/participant	Awarded places/participant	2.11	2.41	-0.3	-12.44%

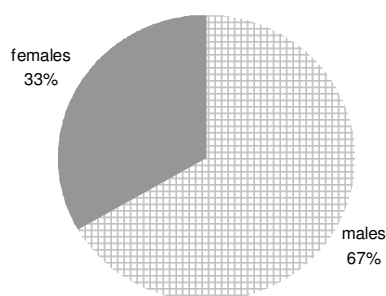


Figure 1. Respondents' distribution based on gender

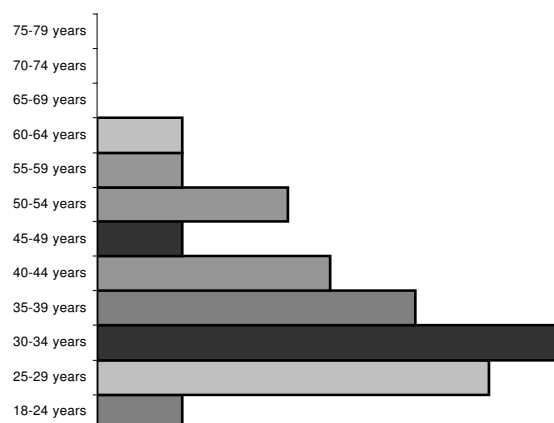


Figure 2. Respondents' distribution on age groups

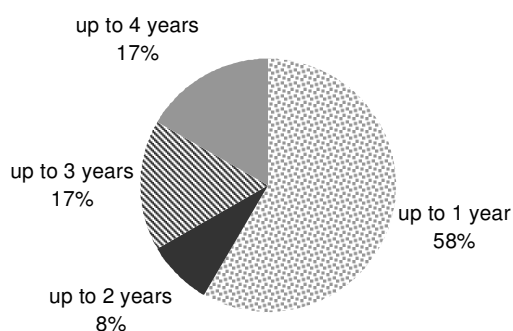


Figure 3. Respondents' distribution based on seniority within the club

The respondents' distribution according to seniority in the club is illustrated in Figure 3.

One can observe a stronger interest for the topic of the research from the new arrivals in the club, as opposed to senior members.

Figure 4 presents the respondents' distribution according to the participation in a masters swimming competition ("Have you ever taken part in a masters swimming competition?").

A healthy majority (over 2/3) has taken part in masters swimming competitions. Given the topic of the research, it was to be expected that the highest rate of respondents would have participated in such competitions.

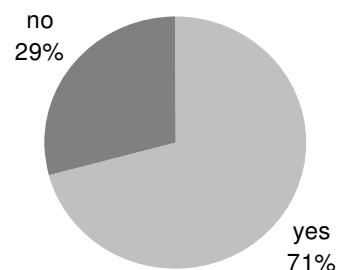


Figure 4. Respondents' distribution according to participation in any masters swimming competition

A. For those that have not taken part in masters swimming competitions (7 respondents)

The answers to the question "What are the reasons for you not taking part in any masters swimming competition?" are depicted in Figure 5.

In an inventory of the reasons for not taking part in any masters swimming competition proposed to the respondents, it can be noticed that the most important rates are the lack of sportive performance (i.e. competitive positioning), respectively, the insufficient knowledge of the swimming technique (technical positioning).

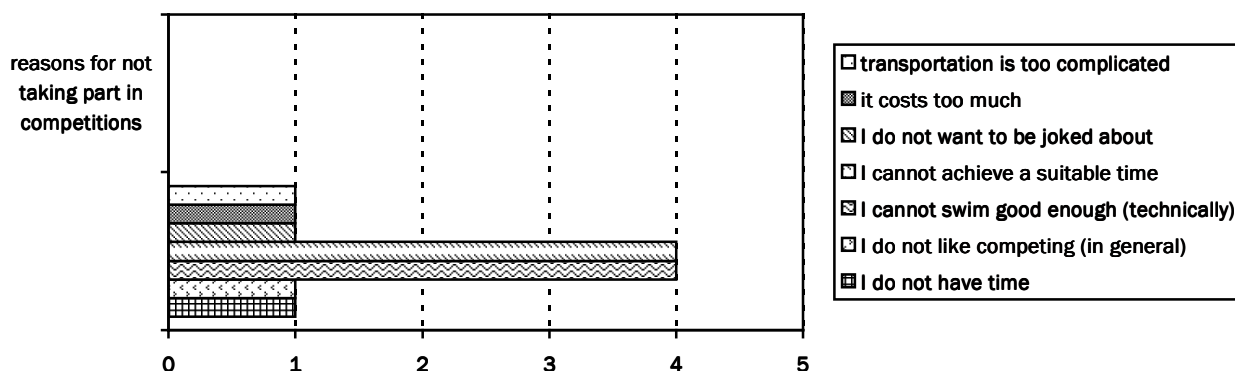


Figure 5. Reasons for not taking part in competitions

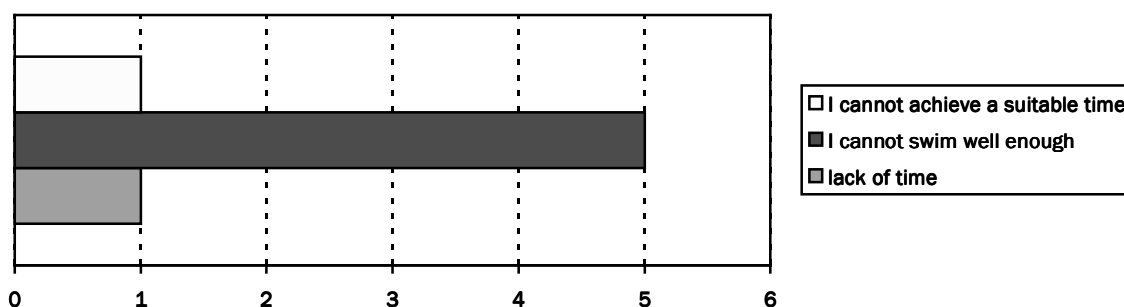


Figure 6. Main reason for not taking part in competitions

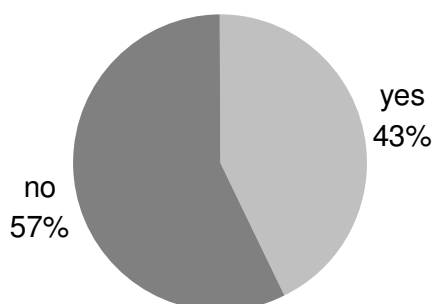


Figure 7. Respondents' distribution in relation to practising performance swimming

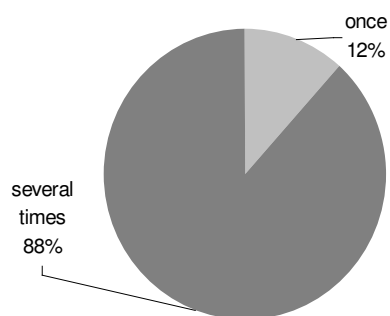


Figure 8. Respondents' distribution according to the participation in at least one masters swimming competition

The answers to the question “Which of the following reasons is the most important for you not to take part in competitions?” are depicted in Figure 6:

For those that have never taken part in any masters swimming competitions, the most important reason

for them not doing so is the insufficient knowledge of the swimming technique.

In Figure 7 the distribution of the respondents that have not taken part in the masters swimming competitions is depicted according to them practising performance swimming. “Even if you have never competed as a masters swimmer, have you ever practised performance swimming? (as a child, teenager, adult...)”.

It should be noticed that a high rate of respondents that have practised performance swimming choose not take part in masters swimming competitions.

B. The situation of those that have taken part in at least one masters swimming competition (17 respondents)

In Figure 8 the distribution of the respondents according to their participation in one or more masters swimming competition is depicted. *It was to be expected that in relation to the interest for the topic of the questionnaire, the rate of those that have participated in a number of competitions is higher than those that have taken part in only one competition.*

The reasons given for taking part in masters swimming competitions are depicted in Figure 9.

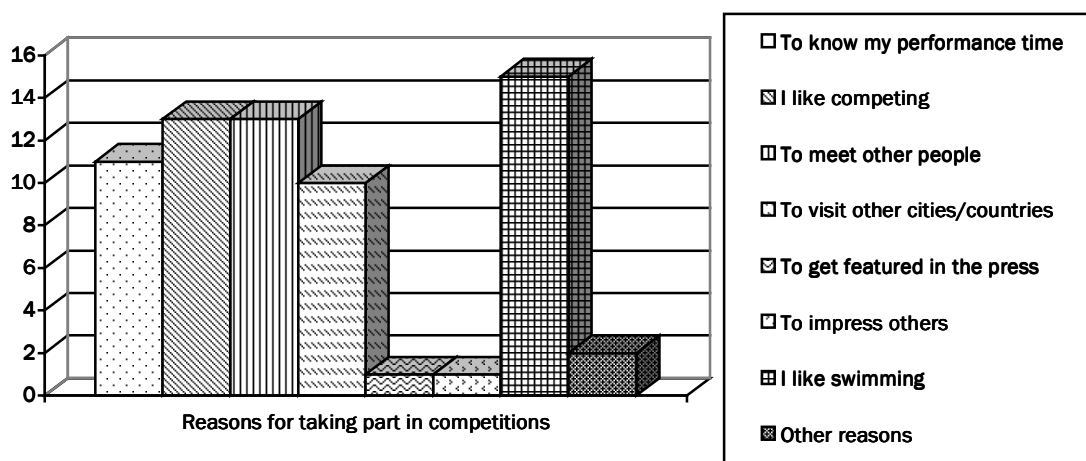


Figure 9. Reasons for taking part in masters swimming competitions

Other reasons:

- a lower entrance fee to the pool;
- to gain further motivation to practise sports constantly.

In an inventory of reasons for taking part in masters swimming competitions proposed to the respondents, one can notice that the highest rate is that of the pleasure of swimming.

The answers to the question “What is the most important reason for you taking part in the competitions?” are depicted in Figure 10.

For those that have taken part in at least one masters swimming competition, the most important reason for them taking part is the pleasure of competing (strong competitive positioning). As one

can notice, the answer differs from the achieved result to the question in which identifying several reasons for taking part in the competition was demanded (the previous question).

The distribution of the respondents according to the most recent participation is depicted in Figure 11.

One can notice that the majority of the respondents have participated in masters swimming competitions in the analyzed year.

The number of respondents that have taken part in masters swimming competitions that have taken place in other city than their residence is depicted in Figure 12.

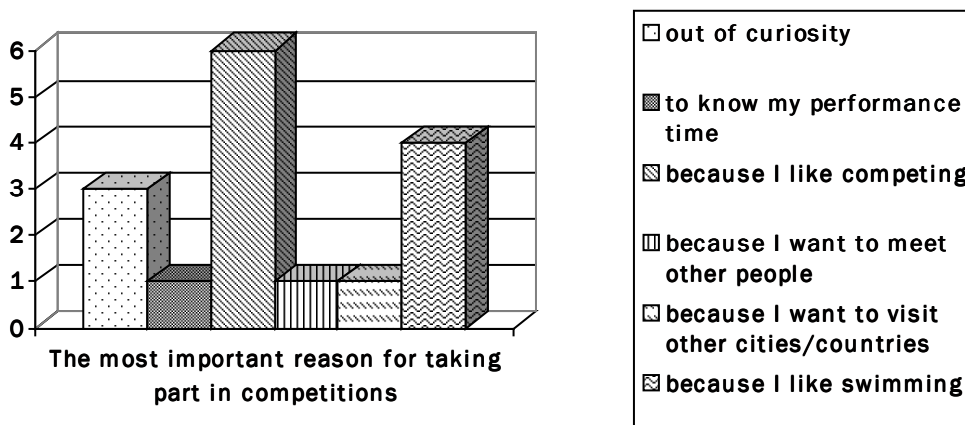


Figure 10. The most important reason for taking part in masters swimming competitions

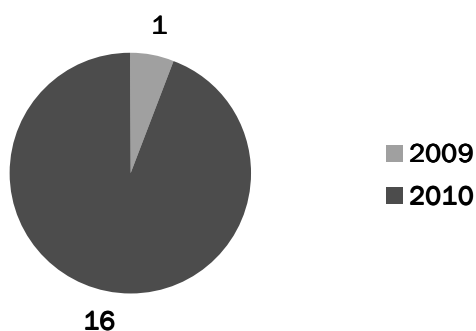


Figure 11. Respondents' distribution according to the most recent participation in a masters swimming competition

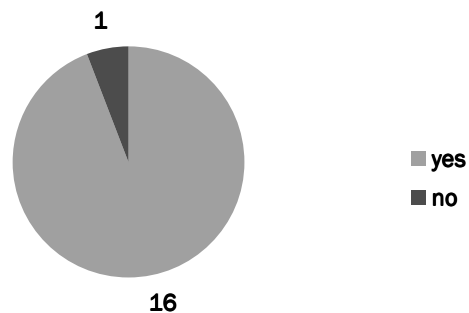


Figure 12. Respondents' distribution according to the participation in masters swimming contests that took place outside the city of residence

One can notice that the healthy majority of the respondents has taken part in masters swimming competitions that have taken place somewhere other than their city of residence.

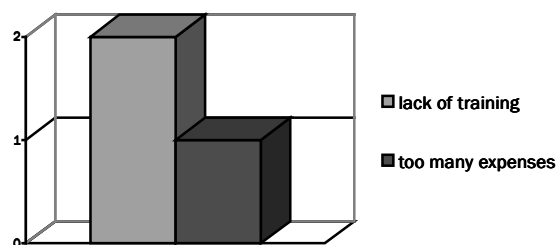


Figure 14. Reasons for not taking part in masters swimming competitions in 2010

The answers to the question “Have you practised performance swimming? (not as an adult!)” are depicted in Figure 13.

Given that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the club members have not practiced performance swimming, one can notice the important rate of those that have started to take part in the competitions as masters swimmers.

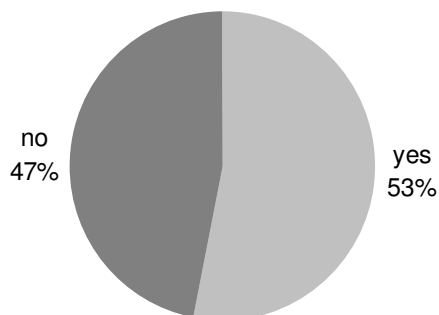


Figure 13. Respondents' distribution in relation to practising performance swimming

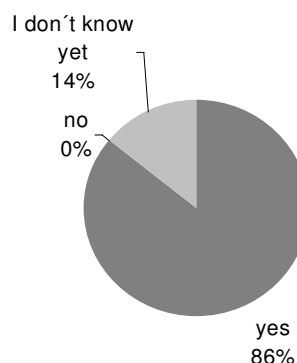


Figure 15. Respondents' distribution according to the intention of participating in masters swimming competitions in 2011

B 1. For those that have taken part in masters swimming competitions, but not in 2010

The reasons for not taking part in masters swimming competitions in 2010 are presented in Figure 14.

For those that have taken part in masters swimming competitions, but not in 2010, the main reason for their lack of participation in 2010 is the lack of sportive training (technical positioning).

The answers to the question “Would you like to take part in any masters swimming competitions in 2011?” are depicted in Figure 15.

One can notice that the majority of those that have not taken part in any competition in 2010 (but have taken part in previous years) continue to be interested in masters swimming competitions.

B 2. For those that have taken part in masters swimming competitions in 2010

The answers to the question “What were that main problems that you have had to cope with in 2010 regarding your participation in the masters swimming competitions?” are depicted in Figure 16.

The lack of time and insufficient sportive training are the main problems that the participants in the competitions had to deal with in 2010. The cost of transportation and, respectively, accommodation and meals are second degree problems.

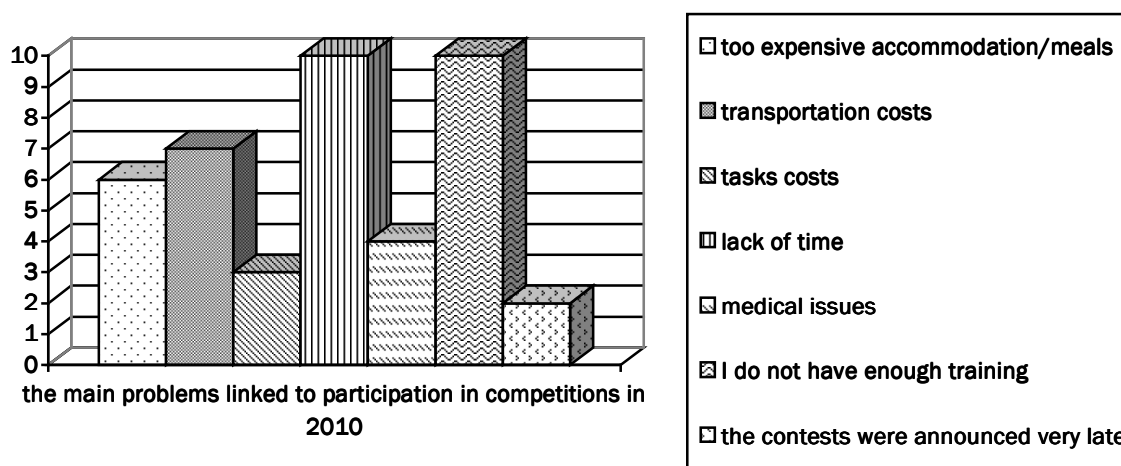


Figure 16. The main problems regarding the participation in masters swimming competitions in 2010

Conclusions

1. Currently, given that circa $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Timișoara club members have not practised performance swimming, and the tendency is that the rate of the former practitioners of high performance swimming to decrease together with the rise in number of club members, one can notice a much higher interest for the topic of the research from the newer members in the club as opposed to the senior members.
2. The significant number of members that, although they have never practised performance swimming previously, do not take part into masters swimming competitions;
3. The lack of sportive performance and swimming technique are the main reasons for the lack of

participation in competition, regardless if the respondents have previously practised swimming or not;

4. One can notice a consistent availability for participation in competitions, given the fact that the majority of respondents has participated in various masters swimming competitions on individual expense. These competitions were held outside their city of residence.

5. The majority of those that have not participated in competitions in 2010 (but have participated in previous years) continue to be interested in masters swimming competitions.

6. Insufficient sportive training is one of the main problems that participants in the competitions had to face.

7. The financial costs do not represent the main issues for taking part in competitions. Given the fact that the lack of time and the insufficient sportive training are the main problems that the participants in the competitions had to face in 2010, and the cost of transportation and, respectively, the cost of accommodation and meals are second degree problems, one can presume that a significant influence of the financial crisis over the competitive engagement of the club members does not exist. At the same time, one could conclude that the policy used at present within the club for the stimulation of participation in competitions through the proportional subsidization of the tasks' costs in relation to the competitive engagement is pertinent.

Recommendations

- Organizing training stages in the swimming technique for club members;
- Advising members regarding the training methods that can be used to increase sportive performance (seminars, dedicated section on the Internet, experience exchanges between clubs, collabora-

tion with institutions of professional expertise in the field, such as, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports etc.)

- Developing the club policies of promoting the participation in competitions through adopting further measures of sustaining the competition entrance fees by the club.

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