

Alpine skiing habitual practices as free time entertainment for the students of West University of Timișoara - case study

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Abstract

The students of the West University of Timișoara represent a numerous social category, thus quite significant, continuously in search of new ways to practice sports in their free time. The winter season brings to our attention a number of specific activities, most appealing, amongst which alpine skiing, too. The present paper aims at defining the students' habits regarding the way they spend their spare time, mainly as practicing alpine skiing. This sports branch enhances its attractiveness by the very special environment it can be practiced – into the mountains, in the open air, which actually raises the students' interest for this free time activity, mainly during the winter vacation or the vacation between semesters, when the number of students largely exceeds the number of those practicing ski during the week or in weekends. We must take into account the fact that they prefer mountain resorts in Romania, not being picky at all when it comes to meals and accommodation facilities, but very demanding about the quality of the ski slopes and the correspondent facilities. The window of time allocated for skiing activities, an average between 1-3 hours/day, illustrates the students' interest in spending their spare time in an active way. The relatively high costs of this sports branch, mainly because of the expensive equipments but also because of the high costs of the activity itself- courses, utilities, etc.- haven't kept the students away; they have been manifesting their availability to invest the necessary amounts of money in order to be able to practice this sport. An excellent promotion factor of the alpine skiing amongst students has been the Timisoara West University by organizing theme camps – like ski teaching, but also a number of activities related to such a camp.

Keywords: *alpine skiing, student, habit, sport trend*

Rezumat

Studentii Universității de Vest din Timișoara reprezintă o categorie socială numeroasă, și de aceea importantă, aflată într-o veșnică căutare de modalități de practicare a sportului de timp liber. Sezonul de iarnă aduce în atenția acestora o serie de activități specifice deosebit de atractive printre care și schiul alpin. Lucrarea de față încearcă să stabilească care sunt obișnuințele acestora cu privire la consumul de sport de timp liber în special ca practicanți ai schiului alpin. Atractivitatea față

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de această ramură de sport este determinată și de mediul cu totul deosebit în care aceasta se desfășoară, în spațiul montan, în aer curat, fapt ce sporește interesul studenților pentru această activitate cu precădere în timpul vacanței de iarnă sau a celei intersemestriale unde numărul lor este covârșitor în raport cu cei care obișnuiesc să practice schiul în timpul săptămânii și în weekend. De remarcat este faptul că aceștia preferă stațiunile montane din România, fiind deloc pretențioși la condițiile de cazare și masă, însă foarte atenți la condițiile pârtiei și a utilităților de deservire a acesteia. Timpul alocat activităților de schi, între 1 – 3 ore pe zi în medie ne arată interesul acestora față de petrecerea timpului liber într-un mod activ. Schiul alpin fiind considerat ca fiind o ramură de sport costisitoare în special datorită echipamentului necesar, dar și a costului activității în sine, cursuri, utilități ș.a., nu a reușit să-i îndepărteze pe studenți, aceștia având disponibilitatea de a investi sumele necesare în vederea practicării acestei ramuri de sport. Un bun factor al promovării schiului alpin în rândul studenților ar fi reprezentat de implicarea facultății de profil din cadrul Universității de Vest din Timișoara în organizarea unor tabere studențești care să vizeze predarea schiului, dar și a activităților conexe specifice unei astfel de tabere.

Cuvinte cheie: *ski alpin, student, obișnuință, sport trend*

Introduction

Alpine ski has become a trend, a mass phenomenon among various categories of persons, eager to practice sports activities in their free time, which is reflected as well in the degree and pace of development of mountain resorts in the country.

Romania's tourism potential, characterized by accessible forms of relief harmoniously combined, with a favourable climate and specially due to its national cultural heritage appreciated all over the world, has made alpine skiing the major component of mountain tourism.

These realities are supported by the presence of 31 ski mountain resorts, with a total of 109 ski slopes, of which 30 are ratified, equipped with artificial snow installations and 13 being equipped with night equipments [1].

Students represent an important social category in search of winter free time activities, mainly during the winter vacation and the vacation between semesters and under the circumstances, alpine ski is an opportunity to diversify and complete urban free time activities. [2]. The presence of the students on the local sports centers makes us consider them an active and well represented category of free time sports.

Meanwhile, superior education institutes, together with the Sports and Youth Ministry have been developing the best strategies in order to stimulate free time sports practice among students, thus information on the students habits in practicing alpine ski represents a real support in most objectively identifying those types of activities which are the students' favourites.

A strong argument in favour of alpine skiing as the students' entertainment and free time activity is brought by its positive effects on the human body, mainly because the natural environment it is practiced into [3].

The aim of the present research is to identify the students' habits in practicing alpine skiing as a free time sport, thus underlining the magnitude of the phenomenon, their preferences and needs, as well as the lacks they face in organizing and participating to specific activities.

Since alpine skiing is an important means used by the students to practice winter free time sports, it constitutes a major present issue for our country.

Hypothesis

Skiing is a sports branch very popular among students who practice it both in an organized and unorganized form, being available to make the necessary investments for equipments and proper conditions for practicing skiing.

Objectives of the case study were to:

- identify the number of students in various faculties of West University of Timisoara who practice alpine ski;
- determine the organizing patterns of ski activities the students carry out;
- which is the students' investment affordability in order to support these activities.

The case study was carried out at the level of 11 Faculties within the Timisoara West University, between 01 March – 21 May 2010.

The stages carried out were the following:

- 1–15 March 2010 pilot study;
- 16 March–16 April 2010 the questionnaires on the studied sample group;
- 17 April–21 May 2010 centralization and interpretation of data.

The case study was carried out on a sample group of 384 respondents, of 23 588 students registered in the university year 2009-2010 at the West University of Timisoara.

The target group were selected by using the method of random numbers table, in order to have a uniform distribution. The sample group represents a 50% probability and a 5% error rate. The method used was the inquiry, with questionnaires containing 18 questions: 16 closed questions, 1 open question and 1 mix question.

Results of the research

In the first phase of research, the respondents were questioned about their habit of practicing alpine skiing as a free time sport; they were asked to answer the question: "Are you in the habit of going skiing?" To this first question we obtained the following results from the respondents: 202 (52.6%) answered affirmatively and 182 (47.4%) answered negatively. The results reflect a fairly equal rate of students who practice alpine skiing and those who don't, the difference being of only 5,2% in favour of the former. We were also interested in the distribution of the affirmative answers of students attending different faculties, so that we could observe which faculty is best represented (Table 1).

Table I. Students' habit to go skiing/Distribution on faculties

Faculty	Total (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)
Arts and design	5	5	0
Chemistry, Biology and Geography	56.25	25	31.25
Law and Administrative Sciences	82.75	44.82	37.92
Physical Education and Sports	100	25	75
Economics and Business Administration	42.95	26.83	16.10
Physics	60	40	20
Political Sciences	61.11	24.99	36.11
Letters, History and Theology	48.71	48.71	0
Mathematics and Informatics	48	12	36
Music	40	20	20
Sociology and Psychology	70.83	60.41	10.41

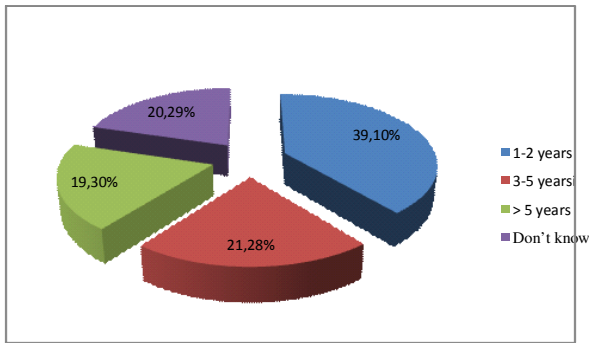


Figure 1. Period of time since when students have been practicing alpine ski

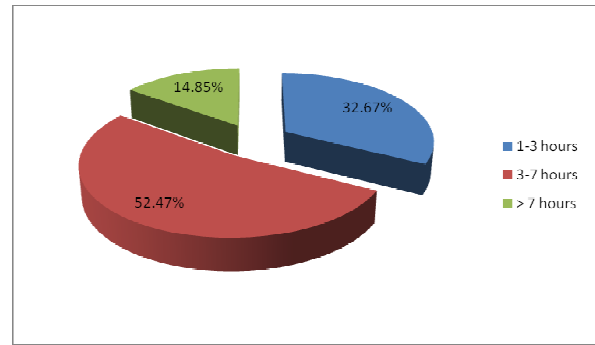


Figure 4. Average number of hours/day allocated for skiing

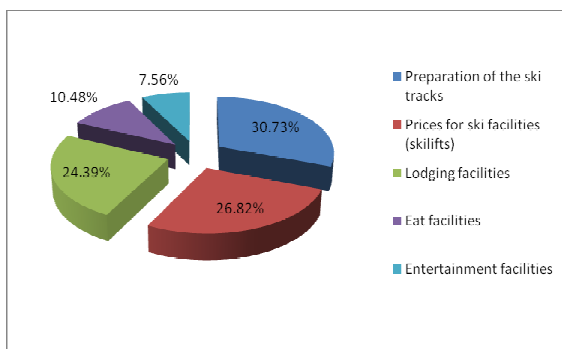


Figure 2. Motivation of choices for mountain ski resorts

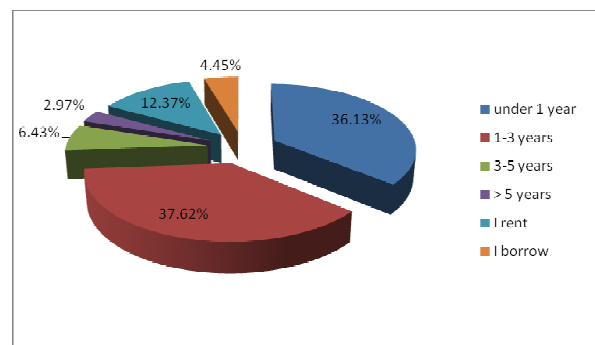


Figure 5. Age of the ski equipment

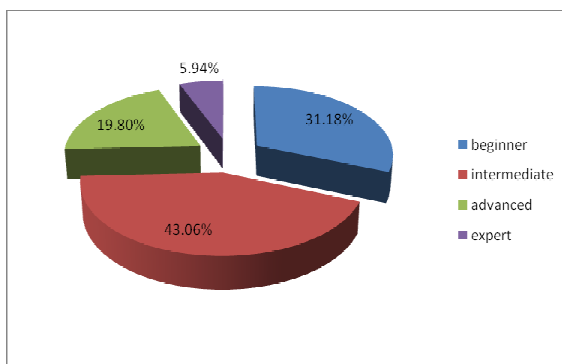


Figure 3. Level of performance of the students

Thus, the conclusion was that The Faculty of Physical Education and Sports was best represented, in a percentage of 91.2% of the respondents who practice alpine skiing in their free time, but it has to be taken into account that the students of this faculty benefit from training courses along the first two study years, which creates an advantage regarding information and building of a broader perception of alpine skiing as a free time sport.

The next position is occupied by the students attending the Law Faculty, with a percentage of 82.75%, being followed by those of the Faculty of Sociology, Psychology and Social Assistance, with 70.83% and the Faculty of Political Sciences, with 61.11%. The last positions are occupied by the Faculty of Music (40%) and Arts (5%), whose students show the least interest in practicing alpine skiing; they motivate their lack of interest by the high costs of their education, which diminishes their financial possibilities.

Next step of study was the written questionnaire, applied to the respondents who gave an affirmative answer to the oral questionnaire.

To the question "How long have you been skiing?" most of the respondents (39.1%) answered "at most for 1-2 years", and (19.3%) of the respondents answered "over 5 years" (Figure 1).

The most popular period of time for skiing is during vacations (65.34%), followed by weekends (26.23%). It is noticeable that the students attending vocational faculties (Physical education, Music, Arts) prefer (100%) prefer skiing during the vacations, while the rest of the students go skiing in weekends, as well (44.4% - 8.8%) (Table 2). As far as students' favourite ski locations are concerned, 170 students (84.2%) choose ski resorts in Romania, while only 32 students (15.8%) prefer ski resorts abroad. The reasons for these choices are the most diverse: ski slopes equipment and quality (30.7%), prices for ski facilities (26.8%), quality of accommodation facilities (24.4%), quality of food services (10.5%), the existence entertainment services (7.6%) (Figure 2). Concerning the means of transportation to the ski resorts, students usually choose for personal car (63.4%), or the train (17.8%), bus (11.9%).

In choosing the means of transport, the respondents take into consideration the degree of comfort offered (49%), costs involved (30.7%), fun (20.3%).

When it comes to their own perception of their motility performances, most of them perceive themselves at a medium level (43.1%), being followed by the beginners (31.2%); those who see themselves as advanced, respectively experts, are the fewest 19.8% and 5.9% (Figure 3).

The work volume is represented by the number of hours spent on the ski slope/day: 52.5% spend between 3-7 hours, 37.7 spend between 1 and 3 hours and 14.9% spend more than 7 hours on the ski slopes. These figures are closely related to the degree of motility performance of the respondents. (Figure 4)

In order to learn how to ski, only 20.3% work with ski trainers and 79.7% prefer friends' help or they learn by themselves (autodidacts).

The availability to purchase the ski equipments is fairly high, if we take into account that 36.1% own equipments which are than 1 year old and only 3% own ski equipments older than 5 years (Figure 5). The criteria in choosing the equipment are: available budget 32.7% and for only 10.9% the criterion is the brand (Figure 6).

The students wish that skiing camps should be opened (84.7%), either within their Faculties or by the Physical Education and Sports Faculty.

Table II. Times of the year when students usually go skiing – distribution on faculties

Faculty	Holiday(%)	Weekend (%)	Week(%)
Arts and design	100	0	0
Chemistry, Biology and Geography	55.55	44.44	0
Law and Administrative Sciences	50.00	41.66	8.33
Physical Education and Sports	100	0	0
Economics and Business Administration	56.25	34.37	9.37
Physics	100	0	0
Letters, History and Theology	64.42	26.31	5.26
Mathematics and Informatics	50	41.66	8.33
Music	100	0	0
Sociology and Psychology	85.29	8.82	5.88

Conclusions

According to the results, skiing represents a trend among the students, most of them are new practitioners, for at most 1-2 years, they prefer to practice skiing on vacation.

Fewer respondents prefer go skiing on weekends or during the week, because these times are usually reserved for professional or social activities. Options regarding the favourite ski locations definitely go for our country, and the transport means depend on the students' financial possibilities. The reasons in choosing the ski resorts come to support skiing in the home country, where accommodation, food and other entertainment services fall on the second place, compared to the quality of the ski slopes and the fees for the ski facilities (slope lifts).

Most students see themselves possessing a medium ski technique, the majority spending between 3-7 hours on improving their skiing technique and between 1-3 hours on the ski slope, which covers the premises for learning how to ski.

Speaking of their consumer habits, we can state that students change their ski equipments quite often, at least every 3 years, and the criteria in choosing the

ski equipment are the most objective ones: budget and performances.

A final conclusion would be that students expect the Timisoara West University and other existing organizations to open ski camps where students be offered the best conditions to learn how to ski.

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