Abstract. *This paper addresses quality of life from a marketing perspective; therefore the concept is defined as the manner in which socio-economic conditions respond to the expectations and needs of the individual, thus leading to a certain degree of satisfaction. From all the quality of life dimensions and indicators, the present article focuses on the correlation between quality of life and sports, presenting the results of a primary research that analyzed the Romanian consumer's perception on quality of life – sport relationship. The main and perhaps the most important conclusion of this research is that sport is mentioned as the main way to improve quality of life, showing that in the human consciousness there is a direct link between sport and a better life, but this connection must be activated at the behavioral level. This can be done by a marketing strategy that takes into account the quality of life dimensions that were identified both by theoreticians, and by population as being related to sport - health, education, social integration, personal development and recreation/relaxation (leisure).*

Keywords: quality of life, sports, marketing research, consumer perception.

ROMANIAN CONSUMER'S PERCEPTION ON QUALITY OF LIFE – SPORT RELATIONSHIP

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1. Introduction

The concept of quality of life (QoL) has a large magnitude so that the literature could not provide a universally accepted definition. The main reason for the present differences regarding the concept's definition stands in the variety of areas from which quality of life draws its methods and analysis tools, of which the most important are sociology and economy. Given that this paper addresses quality of life from a marketing perspective, the concept can be defined as the manner in which socio-economic conditions respond to the expectations and needs of the individual, thus leading to a certain degree of satisfaction. This definition is part of the subjective theory of quality of life, which defines the concept from the individual's perspective, while the objective approach uses mainly macroeconomic indicators, reflecting the quality of life at the society level (Costanza, 2008).

The need to make a differentiation in QOL approach is present even in the early '70 papers, when the specialists were preoccupied with the population's level of satisfaction regarding their living conditions (Stagner, 1970). However, a direct preoccupation with the objective/subjective duality can be found starting with the work of Siri Naess (1999) and Robert Cummins (2000), joined later by Joar Vittersr (2004) or Bernhard Christoph and Heinz-Herbert Noll (2003).

Besides these two approaches, due to the complexity of the concept, quality of life was often defined by its dimensions, of which the most important are health, education, material wealth, work, social relationships, recreation and leisure, environmental conditions, culture, citizen safety and political stability (Şerban-Oprescu, 2011).

This paper focuses on the relationship between quality of life and sports, and the evaluation of such a correlation is included mainly in the subjective approach of quality of life, bearing in mind that the present study targets the manner in which individuals perceive the impact of sports on their quality of life.

2. Literature review

Given the fact that sport is not one of the main dimensions of quality of life, the theory is quite limited in terms of highlighting the relationship between sport activities and quality of life. Most works come from the sphere of sociology of sport, works that focus on sport's utility for the society and for the individual (Coakley, 2007; Coalter, 2007; Houlihan, 2008; Jarvie, 2006; McPherson et al., 1989).

A research topic that is often found in sociology of sport literature is related to the importance of sport for social integration. Many specialists have written papers that discuss this theme to highlight the role the sport for social inclusion and how they can promote such behavior (Collins and Kay, 2003; Ibbetson, Watson and Ferguson, 2003; Kelly, 2011; Velija, 2009).

Although not all studies on quality of life include sport as an indicator of analysis, there are studies linking the quality of life to sport activities. Such researches can be divided into two categories, depending on the sports items included:

- studies that focus on specific sport tangible elements - the infrastructure made available to persons wishing to practice sports (for example, "Perception survey on quality of life in European cities", which is part of Eurobarometer);
- studies that mainly concern with sporting activities carried out by citizens (ACNielsen survey on quality of life in New Zealand, Stigltz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, Mercer Index, Calvert-Henderson Index).

This article is a continuation of a literature review work concerning the relationship between sport and quality of life (Constantinescu, 2011), which presented an analysis of the theoretical and practical studies, in order to identify the place and role of sport within the quality of life improvement process. Therefore, the next step in such an analysis had to be represented by a primary research, considering the fact that, without the individual's opinion on the relationship between sport and quality of life, all efforts in constructing a QoL improvement strategy through sport activities are useless.

3. Research methodology

In order to identify the role of sport within the quality of life improvement process, a primary research was conducted in order to analysis the Romanian consumer's perception on quality of life – sport relationship. Considering the research scope, there were a series of objectives to be followed:

a) Assessing the significance associated with quality of life dimensions identified in theory as relating to sport
b) Determining the weight that sport services hold in the consumer's budget
c) Identifying a connection made by the individual between sport and quality of life improvement
d) Establishing the quality of life dimensions that respondents associated with sport activities
e) Identify the reasons for which Romanian people are practicing sport activities
f) Identify the reasons for which Romanian people are not practicing sports (barriers for sport involvement).

Besides the above objectives, this research had also a secondary objective concerning the quality of life, in order to determine the context within which the research took place and the factors that may influence the relationship between sport and quality of life.

The working hypothesis is that, although at a declarative level people see a connection between sports and quality of life, in the activities carried out for improving quality of life sport is rarely found, having a low priority.

The research had a sample of 691 persons between 18 and 65 years old, considering the Romanian urban population (for a confidence level of 96% and ± 3.9%

margin of error). Being an academic paper, the research had an empirical sampling method. The selection process used a quota sampling method that took into account age, income and gender, using the percentages shown in Table 1.

For the necessary data collection it was organized a survey with a hidden theme, meaning that respondents were not informed at the beginning which is the actual purpose of the research. The reason for this concealment was to avoid influencing the responses for the first questions concerning the factors associated with quality of life. Looking for a spontaneous mention, it would have been wrong for respondent to know at the beginning of the questionnaire the researcher's interest in sports.

Table 1

The structure of the sample by gender, income and age (%)

Gender		Income (lei)					Age				
M	*F*	*<1000*	*1000-2000*	*2001-3500*	*3501-5000*	*>5000*	*18-25*	*26-35*	*36-45*	*46-55*	*>55*
47	53	10	35	26	16	13	27	30	17	14	12

The survey took place in the spring of 2012, in two waves of data collection, in order to correct any imbalances in the sampling structure, and also to test the research instruments (where marketing specialists were involved, especially in the questionnaire construction).

4. Research results

The results will be presented in separated sections for each research objective, in order to show how Romanian population sees the relationship between sport and quality of life, and also to identify the representative correlations which show the most important factor that influence this relationship.

The presentation of the research results will begin with the corresponding secondary objective - quality of life evaluation, objective through which was describe the context in which the research took place, the level of satisfaction of Romanian people with their standard of living and also the products and services that they can purchase considering the available income.

4.1. Quality of Life in Romania

This first objective has resulted in three questions:

a) On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the quality of your life, where 1 means "very dissatisfied" and 10 "very satisfied"?
b) What kind of quality of life do the products you buy ensure?
c) What type of needs does the income you have covers?

a) The average level of satisfaction felt towards quality of life is 6.8 (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means very satisfied), so we can conclude that respondents are relatively satisfied with their quality of life, which is revealed also by Figure 1.

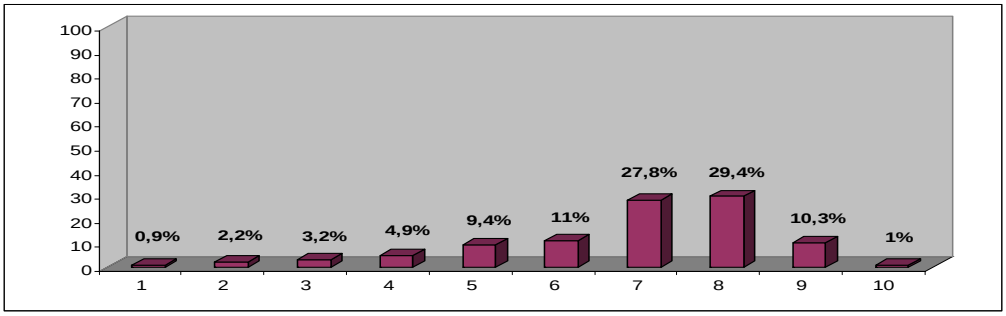


Figure 1. **The level of satisfaction with quality of life, on a scale from 1 to 10 (%)**

Regarding the relationship between the individual's characteristics and the level of satisfaction towards quality of life, the cross tabulations have shown the following conclusions:

- *gender* – there are differences between men and women, the average raging from 6.26 for men to 7.27 for women;
- *age* – the older they get, the lower become the level of satisfaction (as shown in Table 2);

Table 2

Correlation between age and level of satisfaction with quality of life (on a scale from 1 to 10)

Age	Average level of satisfaction
18-25 years	6,99
26-35 years	6,97
36-45 years	6,78
46-55 years	6,63
Over 55 years	6,17

- *education* – increasing education leads to higher levels of satisfaction with quality of life, ranging from an average of 6.11 for those who have completed only primary school up to 7.19 for those with higher education;
- *income* – the same ascending trend is recorded for correlation with income, ranging from 6.12 for those with incomes below 1000 lei, up to 7.36 for those with incomes of more than 5000 lei.

b) Regarding the quality of life provided by purchased products, most respondents (51.31%) indicated a good quality, followed by those with a satisfactory quality (as can be seen from Table 3). The average score of 3.58 (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is a very good quality of life) leads to the conclusion that most respondents have a relatively good quality of life through the products purchased.

Table 3

Quality of life provided by purchased products (%)

Quality of life	Percent
Very good	6,56
Good	51,31
Satisfactory	37,17
Poor	3,94
Very poor	1,02

Based on respondent's characteristics, there are a series of differences also for this question, the cross tabulation indicating differences in relation to gender, age, education level and income:

− *gender* – women obtain a better quality of life through purchased products in comparison with men;

− *age* – with increasing age decreases the quality of life experienced by individuals in relation to purchased products; the explanation of such a regression may be related to the occurrence of more needs and responsibilities together with age and therefore with household increase, which leads to a sacrificing of the products purchased for own needs;

− *education* – people with higher education levels (graduate and postgraduate studies) experience a higher level for quality of life in relation to purchased products;

− *income* – income growth leads to improved quality of life through purchased products.

c) Regarding the type of needs that individuals are able to cover with available income, it was noted that most respondents fall in the second or third category from the table below, which shows that people can afford to purchase a number of products in addition to the ones specific for basic needs. It should be noted that the results are influenced by the fact that the study was conducted mainly in the urban area, where it is known that the purchasing power is higher than in rural areas.

Table 4

Type of needs that individuals are able to cover with available income (%)

	Percent
All purchased products are for basic needs	16,6
Most purchased products cover only basic needs	36,8
Usually, I allow myself to also buy products to treat myself, besides the basic needs	43,6
Most purchased products are to treat myself	3,0

This result is interesting to analyze also in correlation with the characteristics of each respondent, thus a bivariate analysis was conducted in correlation with gender, age, education level, income and marital status. The Chi square test showed that the only demographic variable without a statistically significant influence is gender. Below is presented the manner in which the rest of the demographic variables influence the type of needs covered with the available income:

- *age* – young people can afford a higher frequency in buying products to treat themselves (the percentage being 43%, compared with only 9.5% for people over 55 years); the Chi-square test shows that there are significant differences between groups (with a Chi-square value of 74,687), for a p-value of 0.05 and 12 degrees of freedom; the contingency coefficient for this correlation (0.312) indicates a medium intensity of the relation between the two variables;
- *education* – people with graduate or postgraduate studies are found among those who purchase a large number of products to treat themselves, while those who had completed only high school are in a fairly large proportion (43.5%) among those who cover only their basic needs with the available income; the Chi-square test shows that there are significant differences between groups (with a Chi-square value of 71,094), for a p-value of 0.05 and 9 degrees of freedom;
- *income* – as expected, the greater the income, the higher the percentage of those who buy most products to treat themselves; the Chi-square test shows that there are significant differences between groups (with a Chi-square value of 81,889), for a p-value of 0.05 and 12 degrees of freedom;
- *marital status* – is interesting to note that single people can afford to buy more products to treat themselves, while the married are largely limited to products that cover basic needs; the explanation of such a result may be based on the fact that married people are responsible for the needs of many people, not only from their own; the Chi-square test shows that there are significant differences between groups (with a Chi-square value of 51,350), for a p-value of 0.05 and 9 degrees of freedom.

A relevant correlation for the present research (the link between sport and quality of life) is the one between sport practice and the needs covered with available income. As can be seen from Figure 2, there is a directly related link between the two variables.

The Chi square test shows a statistically significant link between the two variables. But the contingency coefficient (0.168) indicates a relatively weak intensity of that link.

From this correlation can be concluded that one of the factors demotivating in sports activities is income, taking into account the fact that people who buy only basic needs are those that are the least involved in sports (only 33.9% play a type of sport).

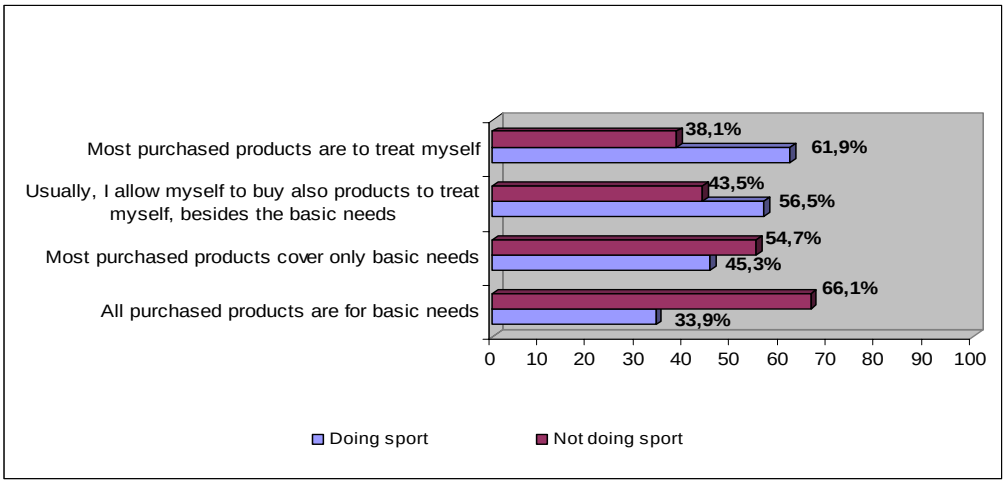


Figure 2. **Correlation between doing sport and the needs covered with available income (%)**

4.2. The importance associated to quality of life dimensions identified in theory as being related to sport

In theory, sport is included most often in quality of life dimensions such as health, recreation and leisure, social relations and education. To learn the importance of sport, it is necessary to first assess the significance of each dimension. Research participants were asked to make a top five of the most important quality of life dimensions from their point of view, in Table 5 being presented the score obtained by each dimension, with the understanding that a higher score means a higher importance.

Table 5

The importance of quality of life dimensions

Dimension	Average coefficient
Health	4,13
Material wealth	2,97
Education	1,75
Workplace	1,72
Recreation and leisure	1,30
Social relations	1,05
Citizen safety	0,69
Culture	0,64
Environment	0,47
Political stability	0,29

Analyzing the data in Table 5 (where the quality of life dimensions associated by theory with sports are marked in bold), it can be concluded that the most effective relationship between quality of life and sport is related to health, dimension with significantly greater importance than any other dimension of quality of life in Romania.

It should be noted that education is better ranked than social relationships or recreation and leisure (dimensions usually associated with movement in most programs that promote sport in society), therefore, in order to make a more attractive future strategy for promoting quality of life through sport, the educational side of practicing sport should be emphasized.

4.3. The weight that sports services hold in the consumer's budget

In the total budget of the Romanian consumer, sports services takes one of the last places (only 6.56% together with medical services and body maintenance), indicating a relatively low interest in sport, perhaps due to financial limitation felt by the individual in his intension to buy sport products and services.

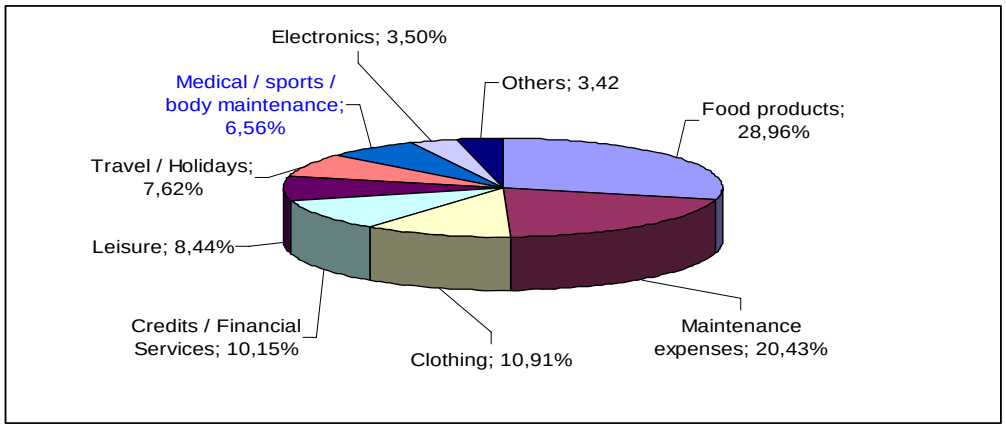


Figure 3. **Budget divisions (%)**

Considering the percentage in Figure 3, the orientation in strategies for promoting sport should be towards the gratuity of its practice, by increasing the number of dedicated facilities and competitions such as "Sports for All".

This objective should be linked to the one related to the type of needs covered with available income, taking into account the correlation shown in Figure 2, where it can be observed an inverse correlation between the number of needs covered with the available budget and sports.

As can be seen from the Table 6, there are no significant differences between the four categories of respondents in terms of income allocated to medical/sports/body

maintenance, which is ranging between 6.1% and 7%. But it can be observed a variation within a category of services that is related to sports – leisure.

Table 6

Correlation between the needs covered with the available budget and the budget divisions (%)

	All purchased products are for basic needs	Most purchased products cover only basic needs	Usually, I allow myself to also buy products to treat myself, besides the basic needs	Most purchased products are to treat myself	Total
Food products	35,4	31,0	25,5	18,3	29,0
Maintenance expenses	24,6	23,3	17,2	10,0	20,4
Clothing	7,7	8,7	13,1	23,8	10,9
Credits / Financial Services	9,5	11,3	9,7	5,5	10,2
Leisure	6,1	6,7	10,4	14,4	8,4
Travel /Holidays	5,0	6,0	9,7	12,2	7,6
Medical / sport / body maintenance	6,9	7,0	6,1	6,7	6,6
Electronics	2,3	2,7	4,4	7,4	3,5
Others	2,5	3,4	3,9	1,8	3,4

In terms of leisure, the percentage increases with the growth of the available budget, ranging from just 6.1% for those who say that all products purchased are for basic needs up to 14.4% for those with higher revenue (declaring that most products are bought to treat themselves). Correlating the increase in percentage for leisure with the stagnation of percentage for sports services, it can be concluded that an increase in population involved in sporting activities can be done in two ways: either through free access to sports, or by highlighting the fact that sport can represent a viable way for leisure, by emphasizing the fun side, aspect for which it was noticed that the individual is willing to spend part of his monthly budget.

4.4. The connection made by individuals between sport and quality of life improvement

At the level of the human consciousness it can be made a series of links between sport and quality of life, all based on the individual's needs and the priority given to them. In order to not influence the responses, research participants were asked to indicate on their own (spontaneously) the activities which, in their view,

could improve quality of life, the question being located in the questionnaire before any others that would refers to sport. Relevant answers to this question are presented in Figure 4. Before commenting on the results obtained, it should be noted that, within the theory of quality of life, the solutions proposed by respondents fall in the capabilities approach, which says that the quality of life depends on what the individual does, not necessarily in what he has, so that respondents tried to imagine what they could do in order to improve quality of life, not what they should have in order to live better.

The results show that sport is the most frequently mentioned solution for improving quality of life (63.37% of all respondents spontaneously mentioning this activity). This demonstrates that the individual is aware of the direct relationship between sport and quality of life improvement, which represents the cognitive dimension of attitude towards sports. An effective communication strategy needs to turn this into a conative dimension (represented by intention or determination to act according to beliefs). The correct transition from the cognitive to the conative dimension is the development of the affective dimension of attitude toward sports, which is a positive association with sports in the human consciousness.

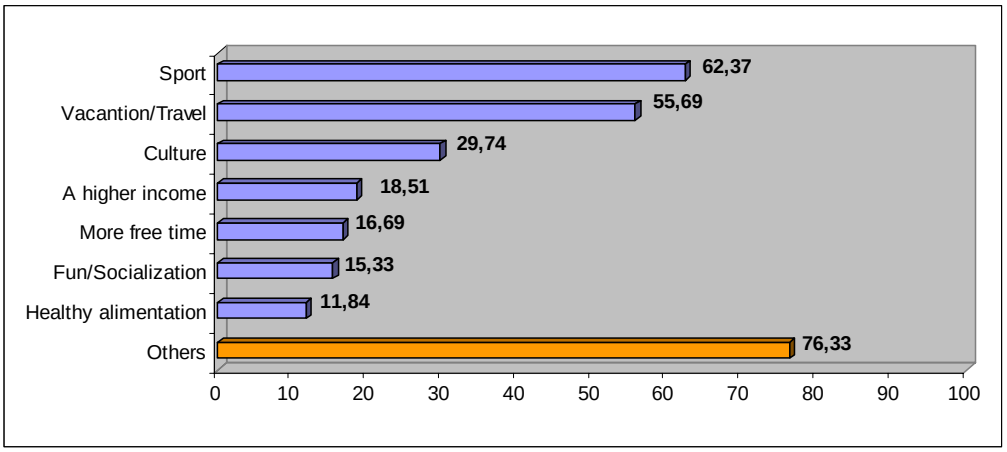


Figure 4. **Respondents' opinion regarding the possibilities to improve the quality of life (%)**

Mentioning the sport as the first solution in improving quality of life suffers a number of influences from the individual's socio-demographic characteristics, in the following table being emphasized the most relevant correlations (Table 7).

Table 7

Correlation between respondents' opinion regarding the possibilities to improve the quality of life and their socio-demographic characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics	Result interpretation
Gender	There is a greater inclination for men towards sport, which is reflected in answer to this question, where 67.3% of men mentioned sport as a way of improving quality of life, while among women the category accounted 58.1%.
Age	The percentage of those who mention sport as a way of improving quality of life decreases with age, ranging from 75.8% in the 18-25 years segment, down to 47.6% for those over 55 years. For those over 45 the most frequently mentioned solution is related to travel and holidays.
Income	There are no significant differences between respondents in relation to income.
Marital status	Sport was the most frequently mentioned solution both by married couples and singles, but the balance tilts significantly in favor of the unmarried, where the percentage of those who proposed sport is 71%, compared with 55.3% for the married respondents. The divorced and widowed mentioned more often vacations / trips, the explanation being related to the age group in which usually are include such persons - as was mentioned also in the correlation with age, people over 45 leans more towards travel in order to improve their quality of life, sport being in second place.

4.5. The quality of life dimensions that respondents associated with sport activities

In parallel with the theory, which already highlighted the quality of life dimensions associated with sports activities, the present research brings to light the individual's perspective on such an association. Given this objective, respondents were asked to evaluate the association between sport and the different dimensions of quality of life (the distribution is given in Figure 5). On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 means a very strong connection), health has achieved an average score of 4.7, relaxation/recreation 4.34, personal development 3.91, education 3.49 and social integration 3.45.

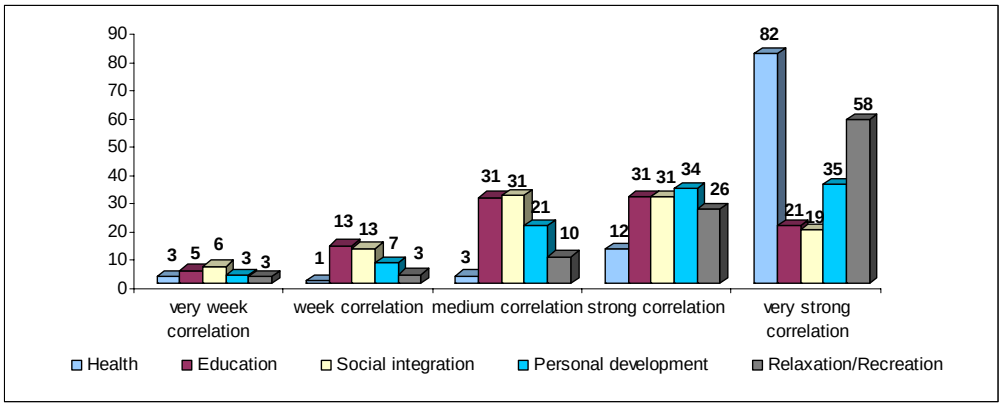


Figure 5. **The degree of association between sport and quality of life dimensions (%)**

In the sport-health relationship it can be observed a quite strong correlation both in the associations made by theorists, as well as in those made individually by each consumer. It should be noted that 82% of respondents believe that between sport and quality of life there is a very strong connection.

Although much discussed both in theory and in the Western Europe practice, in Romania education and social integration are still not well correlated with the benefits obtained through sports, the two dimensions having a score that indicates a moderate link (3.49 and 3.45).

Regarding the correlation of this objective with the socio-demographic variables, from the cross tabulation, were drawn the following conclusions:

- in terms of respondents' *gender*, there are no significant differences between responses of men and women;
- the correlation with *age* shows that young people often tend to associate sports with social integration (54.1% of those aged between 18 and 25 consider that there is a strong or very strong connection between sport and social integration, while in the category of over 55 years the percentage was 33%); also among young people was recorded a stronger association between sport and leisure/recreation;
- is interesting to point out that the *education* level influences the intensity of the connection made between sport and health (64.7% of those who have secondary school as a ultimate form of education believes that there exists a very strong connection between health and sport, whereas for those with postgraduate studies the percentage is 88.3%); the same direct influence from the education level could be founded in the case of sport - social integration association, those with high levels of education considering in a greater percentage that there is a strong link between involvement in sport and integration in society;
- the association between sport and social integration is also influenced by the individual *income*, but this time the extremes are not make the difference, but

rather the middle class, taking into consideration that middle-income people are considering in a greater extent that the two variables have a very strong connection; the same correlation goes on the sports - leisure/recreation association;

- regarding *marital status*, it is noted that those who have a family make a stronger link between sport and education, the explanation consisting in the appearance of more family members that they are responsible for, including their education, hence the identification of some possibilities to improve it (the sport is often one of the least expensive alternatives to provide education for those in the family); this explanation is supported by the correlation with the *number of persons in the household*, where the families with increased number of members considered in a higher percentage that sport influences education.

4.6. Reasons for practicing sports in Romania

Research results corresponding to this objective highlight the motivating factors in sports activities, which could add value to a strategy for promoting sports. As can be seen from Figure 6, the most frequently cited reasons were: keeping in shape, the pleasure of practicing sport, health maintenance and spending time with friends.

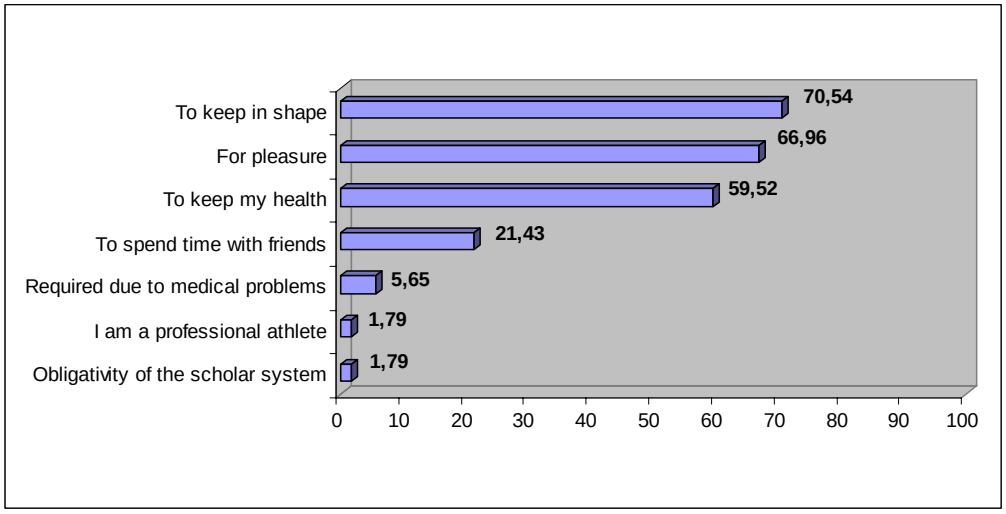


Figure 6. **Reasons for practicing sports in Romania (%)**

There are several reasons that were not formed at the individual initiative, but rather as being a mandatory involvement in sports - health problems (5.65%), sports performance (1.79%) and the requirement of the scholar system (1.79%). However, the percentage of people who mentioned these reasons is low, so it can be concluded that the practice of sport is based on positive motivation.

The cross tabulation between this variable and the socio-demographic variables show the following:

- The main reason why men practice sports is the pleasure, while for women keeping in shape prevail;
- In terms of correlation with age, the first two reasons from Figure 6 decrease in percentage with age, decreasing to half into the category over 55 years compared with young people between 18 and 25 years; is maintained, however, constant in importance, regardless of age, the motivation for health, which shows that the individual, throughout his life, is interested in improving health through sport.

4.7. Reasons for not practicing sports in Romania

These reasons represent barriers in the decision to involve in sports, so understanding them helps in promoting sport by removing items that do not favor the relationship between sport and quality of life.

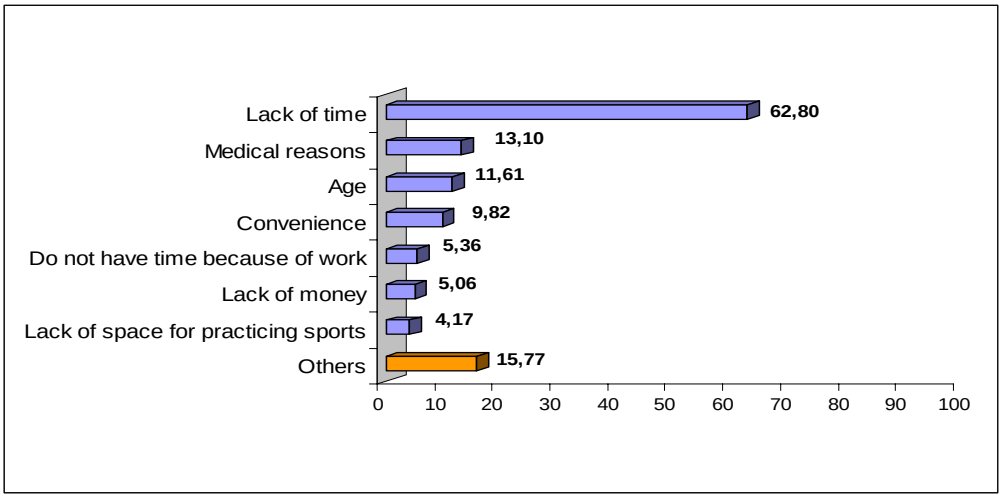


Figure 7. **Reasons for not practicing sports in Romania (%)**

Among the reasons cited by respondents (figure 7), stands out the lack of time (62.8%), which is rather an easy answer to mask a certain convenience. There are also more fundamental reasons, reasons that may be considered for the future campaigns of promoting sport at the society level. One is the lack of necessary funds, which, together with the lack of spaces for sports, may discourage many people with low income to participate actively in sports.

A third category of reasons for not practicing sporting refers to impediments not related to the individual willingness to engage in sports, but rather to his inability to do sports, the most often mentioned being health and age.

5. Conclusions and future researches

The main and perhaps the most important conclusion of this research is that sport is mentioned as the main way to improve quality of life, showing that in the human consciousness there is a direct link between sport and a better life, but this connection must be activated at the behavioral level. This can be done by a marketing strategy that takes into account the reasons why an individual would be willing to participate actively in sports. This strategy should be based on the quality of life dimensions that were identified both by theoreticians, and by population as being related to sport – health, education, social integration, personal development and recreation/relaxation (leisure). Among these dimensions, the most obvious relationship is between sport and health, hence the need for close collaboration between the state institutions that manage the two areas, especially considering one of the most serious problems of the XXI century – obesity.

From this research it was observed that income is a major impediment in the individual decision of doing sports, so the future strategy for promoting sport must emphasize the free of charge practice of sports, the facilities available to the population and the sport events for masses.

Future researches can focus on measuring the impact of sports on the quality of life, by designing a marketing experiment or and observation. Surpassing the most serious disadvantage of a survey – depending on what people are saying that they do, an experiment or an observation can bring reveling information on what people are actually doing and how their activities and decisions are influencing the quality of life. This is the difference between the declarative behavior and the actual behavior, two concepts highly debated in the economic theory and practice.

Acknowledgements

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