



# SPORT, AS AN INFLUENCING FACTOR OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

## The Case Study of Jászárokszállás (Hungary)

Antónia SZŰCS <sup>A\*</sup>, Gábor KONCZ <sup>B</sup>

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### Abstract

The definition and measurement of the concept of regional competitiveness raises many questions. Experts of this topic initially examined the competitiveness of a region with hard statistical indicators. However, another aspect of judging competitiveness is the consideration of soft factors. This study is based on a qualitative survey in a small town in Hungary, in which we examined sport as a soft factor of territorial competitiveness. The aim of the research is to investigate whether and how sport in rural areas contributes to improving the quality of life of local people, community development and population retention. Our results show the positive effects of setting up a new sports center in a small town like Jászárokszállás. The number of residents who are active in sport has increased significantly with new services available locally. We can say that sport had positive impact not only the direct motivation of the respondents but also other areas of life. So, we can reasonably assume that it was recognizable for employers, co-workers, family members and neighbours too. In our study we could show the significance and positive influence of sport and the Sports Centre not only at the level of individuals, but also in shaping and increasing community activity. The circle of acquaintances and social activity among the respondents who use the services has increased significantly in recent years. Based on our results we concluded that sport can play an important role in improving the competitiveness of rural areas. Its positive impact on individuals and communities contributes to making small-town life more attractive, which can be gradually expanded through conscious construction.

### Key words

Sports investments, well-being, motivational factor, sustainable development, community development.

## INTRODUCTION

### Territorial competitiveness and its measurement

Competitiveness is a difficult to measure, competition and competitiveness are determined in many ways in international and national literature. According to Enyedi (1996, 1998), the objective of competition between territorial units is different

A\* Eszterházy Károly University, 3200 Gyöngyös, Mátrai street 36, Hungary  
[szucs.antonina@uni-eszterhazy.hu](mailto:szucs.antonina@uni-eszterhazy.hu) (corresponding author)

B Eszterházy Károly University, 3200 Gyöngyös, Mátrai street 36, Hungary  
[koncz.gabor@science.unideb.hu](mailto:koncz.gabor@science.unideb.hu)



from other types of competition - such as competition between employees and companies - since the main objective is to increase regional income, which can increase well-being and living standards. Lengyel (2012) draws attention to the complexity of the content of competitiveness, according to him, competitiveness is a collective concept, which expresses the tendency and willingness to compete and the ability to gain competitive position, what primarily is shown by in some way measured success and the ability to be it. The issue of the competitiveness of municipalities raises a very diverse questions, it includes the quality of life in the municipalities, in which social, economic and environmental infrastructure, the quantity and quality of available services play an important role (Lengyel, 2003). Thus, when judging the competitiveness of an area, not only economic factors but also social and environmental aspects must be taken into account, especially when it comes to sustainable competitiveness (Doyle and Perez Alaniz, 2017).

The most basic finding is that as a result of competition in the territorial sense, the quality of life of locals increases (Kitson et al. 2004). However, measuring this raises some basic questions. According to Csath (2018), one of the questions of interpretation is how much emphasis can be placed on the definition of so-called hard, measurable factors and less easily measurable soft factors when determining competitiveness. Generally, hard indicators are those that are written by processing statistical data with values calculated from mathematical relationships. In contrast, soft indicators are generated through qualitative research in a subjective approach. In this case, the data are usually based on questionnaire surveys, interviews or focus group studies (Rišová, 2016). Fekete and Berzsényi (2018) says that in the analysis of competitiveness, most of the literature evaluates the competitiveness of a region or region with hard factors. Most of these factors are, for example, unemployment, employment, Gross income serving as personal income tax base per capita are available from statistical databases. In addition to the "hard" factors, the research will also use soft quantitative information, available through a questionnaire survey, since in terms of quality of life it doesn't matter, which factors of municipality's attraction / competitiveness are appreciated by the population and how satisfied they are with them. Koltai (2005) also notes that the methods of analyzing the competitiveness of settlements on a statistical basis are well complemented by questionnaire surveys, since they are also capable of revealing the underlying socio-economic processes. In his study, he is looking for an answer in a representative questionnaire survey, what are the quality aspects that affect the competitiveness of cities that the Hungarian population prefers when choosing their place of residence. In his research carried out in 2004-05 he classified his competitiveness factors into four factors with the help of factor analysis: service factor, existence factor, environment factor, human factor. Koltai's market research results are also trying to answer, whether the public opinion is right, that the cities that provide high income and living standards, their labor market abilities, their living



environment and cultural, educational, sporting, health and commercial services are successful (Koltai, 2014). Developing infrastructure is essential in the life of all settlements regardless of their size. In addition to the declining population in general, in a small town is a really serious task to expand the service functions (Bujdosó et al. 2016). In addition a number of studies highlight the role of education, tourism and regional marketing, image building (Matlovic and Matlovicová (2016); Matlovicová et al. (2016, a); Matlovicová et al. (2019).

Garelli (2002) also points out that competitiveness, if it is only indicated by economic indicators, cannot guarantee the improvement of quality of life. That is why real competitiveness must strike a balance between economic results and the social results of the nation. This also requires attention to historical-cultural characteristics, traditions and value systems.

### **Sport as a value system**

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of sport on the physical, mental and mental state of an individual (Keresztes, 2007). There are fewer athletes smoking, eating healthier, more confident, having fewer psychosomatic symptoms (Mikulán et al. 2010). In addition, those who do sports are able to make friendships, more satisfied with their looks, more future-oriented, and self-regulated behaviour (Petrozhak et al. 2019). All in all, the beneficial effect of sport on health can be demonstrated in all three (somatic, psychic, psychosocial) dimensions of health (Pikó-Keresztes, 2010).

According to Kovács (2015), all this shows that if regular sports appear as a value in the life of an individual, they can gain long-term benefits, even for their entire life, compared to non-athletes. According to Izzo (2005), sport itself can be considered a value since it contributes to the personality development, social socialization, social relationships and development of the individual besides the above mentioned positive effects. In addition, Bailey (2005) believes that sport is also an important tool of social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, and it plays an important role in bridging cultural and ethnic differences.

Many definitions of sport are known; in our study, we examine sport as part of lifestyle in the context of lifestyle-health. The quality of life is influenced by many factors, and the Rahman-model summarizes it in its input-output approach, in which health plays a central role (Sebestyén, 2005). Sport plays an important role in regional sustainable development, some of its areas contribute greatly to improving the quality of life of the population (Lindsey and Chapman, 2017). The European Union distinguishes two basic areas of sport, distinguishes sport as an economic activity, and sports as a social phenomenon. The Union has a clear direction for its member states, with the aim of creating communities whose life-force, quality of life and well-being assume the basis of individual health (Nagy, 2010).



The positive effects of recreational sport have a fundamental impact on the decisions of those involved. Civilization harm reaches the vast majority of the population, causing different problems at the individual level, however, the perception, understanding and response to the problems may vary considerably - think of the relationship between physical and mental health (Brudzinski and Ebben, 2010). The importance and order of exercise motivation may vary widely across different social groups. Of course, differences between men and women are also determined by differences in body building and social expectations. The latter can be explained, that the general importance for women of having a good appearance and meeting social expectations, while for men it is more important to experience competition and develop competencies (Koivula, 1999). It is important that the positive effects of sport on the level of individuals and then summarized in a well-defined social group can be measurable and measurable..

### **Impact of sport on local community**

Among the local government population conservation efforts, economic development ideas are mentioned first and foremost, when settlements seek to attract businesses by supporting businesses, attracting investors, and establishing industrial parks (Guagliano and Riela, 2005). Kórmíves and co-authors (2018) studied sport as a factor in maintaining the population in the countryside. Their research concludes that sport can play a significant role in keeping young people in the countryside. However, in order to become attractive to young people, municipalities also need adequate sports infrastructure and sports facilities. Sports can also play an important role in strengthening the local identity of settlements, when properly combined with the benefits of rural life, can make the life of small towns very attractive to people. Sport, therefore, not only has an impact at the individual level, but also plays an important role in shaping relationships between people. Closer relationships and friendships can occur spontaneously while doing sports. Working together, striving for a common goal is a community-building force and also helps you to integrate into the community (Schulenkorf, 2012).

The social impact of sporting events on the quality of life of the local community is particularly significant. While mega-events often provoke resentment from the local population due to the congestion and other inconvenience they cause, smaller events are generally welcomed by the local community (Slender et al. 2015). Sporting events proportional to the number of local residents can also enhance the sense of community and the pride of residents in their place of residence (Bujdosó and David, 2013). But there are many factors which contribute to marginalization such as people's education, ethnicity and gender. This is especially important in rural areas where can be poor and disadvantaged in comparison to urban areas (Brunn et al. 2018). In these areas, social conflicts may intensify and the



number of crimes may increase, which significantly reduces the sense of security of local residents (Matlovicová et al. 2016, b). Significant social inequalities not only cause problems in the short term such as social tension, crime etc. (Matlovicová, 2010), but also reduce the pace of long-term economic development, as unanimously acknowledged by economists. Expanding the opportunities of recreational sports as a community activity can also help members of the marginalized society (Matlovicová et al. 2016, a). The involvement of local volunteers in the organization and running of sporting events and the use of existing sports facilities open to the local community can, in particular, enhance the positive social impact. (Vargáné and Serre, 2016). Furthermore, the environmental effects of smaller sporting events can usually be managed more efficiently than mega-events that attract larger numbers of visitors causing traffic problems, air and noise pollution. The use of existing infrastructure and the proportion of visitors proportional to the size of the local community do not, in experience, cause irreversible damage to the natural environment (Gibson et al. 2012).

## **OBJECTIVES**

In our study, sport as a soft factor of territorial competitiveness was examined from three aspects: (1) whether and how it contributes to an individual's quality of life (2) whether and how it contributes to local community development (3) whether it contributes to increasing the population retention capacity of rural areas.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Rural development is a complex activity that goes beyond the primary and exclusive development of the economy. In addition to economic development, it is also about improving the quality of life in rural communities. Quality of life is also a complex concept with its subjective components besides its objective factors. The European Union has a clear direction for its member countries, with the aim of creating communities that create the health conditions for individual prosperity. The basic aim of the research is to examine, through a case study, whether the establishment of a sports center in a rural municipality can be considered as an investment in improving the quality of life. In other words, what impact does the use of sports services and consumer activity have on the subjective quality of life of consumers.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

### **Introduction of Jászárokszállás**

The area of the municipality is 77.17 km<sup>2</sup>, with 7734 permanent residents based on the 2016 CSO (Hungarian Central Statistical Office) data. Analysing demographic conditions, we can say that one of the biggest challenges in rural areas, the population retention also appears here. The number of inhabitants decreased by 8% be-



tween 2002 and 2016, which follows the national trend. Jászárokszállás also shows the aging process as in Europe, but we can see as positive that the number of 0-2 year olds has increased by 16% since the turn of the millennium until 2016. However, in the other age groups there is a decline between 2000 and 2016.

Until the end of the Second World War, the traditional agriculture and craft industry were dominant in the settlement, however, the industrialization process of the 1970s brought a significant change in the life of Jászárokszállás. From 2002, the municipality can use the title of "Industrial Park". Companies operating in the Industrial Park, which is also significant at regional level, provide jobs for thousands of people. It has a decisive role in expanding employment opportunities and has an impact on the local economy.

### Primary research

Between January and March of 2019, we surveyed respondents' attitudes, habits and motivations to the sport at the Sports Centre (Eleven Ház). The questionnaire was conducted both on-site and on-line. The total number of evaluable questionnaires was 121, of which 50 were personal interviews and 71 were completed on-line.

The proportion of local residents was 78.5% in the study sample. This points to the small town's role in the network of settlements, the proximity of the central towns limit its central functions in the service sector. A larger proportion of respondents lived in neighboring smaller villages, and the significance of those who arrived from distances more than 20 km was negligible in the sample.

Significantly more women (75.2%) appear in the study sample, which was influenced by their preference for group sessions in the Sports Centre, in addition to their higher willingness to respond. The majority of participants (80.2%) were in the age group between 18 and 50 years of age. However, within the group, different motivations appear between young and middle-aged adults. The low presence of people under 18 (4.1%) can also be explained by the fact that they have access to sporting activities in school physical education classes. We tried to find out the reason for lower participation rate (15.7%) among people over 50 years of age in the context studies.

Based on highest level of education, the respondents with college or university graduation were over-represented in the sample (58.7%). The share of people with secondary education is 36.4%, while those with only basic education are basically young people who have not reached the age of 18.

Another part of our primary research was to conduct an in-depth interview with the owner of "Eleven Ház" Sports Centre. With the help of the interview we got answers about the conditions of the realized investment, the characteristics of the guests, the number of employees, the intention to cooperate with other actors of the settlement, and the future development ideas.



### Brief introduction of the investment (Eleven Ház)

The “Eleven Ház” is implemented and owned by a local entrepreneur. During the in-depth interview with him, first we get an answer about the idea of investing. According to him, the sport was always close to the family, they liked to take a sauna, but they could do it only in Jászberény or Gyöngyös, 20 km away.

After many years of planning, implementation was decided. Their goal was to bring unavailable services to Jászárokszállás without having to travel. They sought complexity with the intention of reaching as many people as possible. To do this, a preliminary needs assessment was carried out and hundreds of questionnaires were received from local residents describing what they needed, what kind of sports they do and what they want to do. They formed their services according to the results. The amount of the investment was 120,000,000 HUF, of which EU support was 25,000,000 HUF.

Based on guest data, an average of 3,000 entries are registered per month, broken down by gender: male: 44%, female: 56%. Table 1 shows that most guests are in the 21-40 age group. Examining the “Eleven Ház” catchment area, the following data were obtained, broken down by place of residence: Jászárokszállás 56%, neighboring settlements 32%, other 12%.

**Table 1** Rate of guests by age in a monthly average

Age	Head	Rate (%)
0-10	2	3.52
11-20	89	14.95
21-30	159	26.71
31-40	141	23.69
41-50	108	18.14
51-60	47	7.89
61-70	25	4.20
71-	5	0.84
Total	595	100.00

Source: Own calculation based on the in-depth interview. 2019.

The sports facility provides permanent employment for a total of 21 people, including 10 staff members and 11 trainers. The “Eleven Ház” places great emphasis on co-operation with other actors of the town in organizing joint events. The “Hello Nyár” event is co-organized with the Local Government of Jászárokszállás on the open-air bath of the settlement. Students of the municipal gymnasium and elementary school as well as elementary schools of two neighboring settlements (Visznek, Vámosgyörk) visit the “Eleven Ház” each year for physical education. The



Challenge Day, organized by the Parent Working Community of the Jászárokszállás Primary School, is provided by the facility. In addition, other sport, social or charitable events are supported by donations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

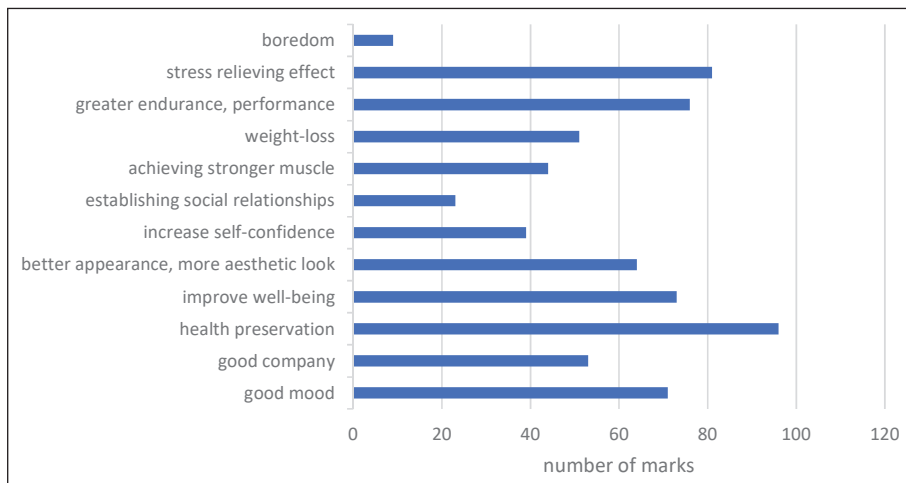
The presence of the Sports Centre in the town is considered very important by the vast majority (89.3%) of respondents, which can be attributed to the fact that residents of small towns continue to carry out a lifestyle similar to that of large cities. Work often involves more mental stress while minimizing physical strain. This transformation process has created a real need in the sports services market. 58.7% of respondents were extremely dissatisfied with the availability of local sports facilities before the investment. A very significant effect of the opening of the "Eleven Ház" can be seen in the result of the survey: 31.4% of participants did not practise any sport activities at all in the previous period. Most of the attendants are very active in sports and can be said port belong to their lifestyle. 49.6% of the study group use the Sports Centre several times a week.

Our study also looked at what motivational factors play a role in using the services of "Eleven Ház". As a result, it can be stated that the interviewees most often do sports for health related reasons, the most important factors are preserving health, stress relieving and improving well-being. Thus, most of the decisive reasons can be related to the prevention and solution of the problems caused by the modern lifestyle. The main reason for this is that most of today's jobs involve minimal or unbalanced physical strain on the employee. Mental, psychical and physical stressor effects are very different. However, free and easy physical activities can have positive effects on all three categories. For many people, improving performance, a good mood, and a better look are also important goals (Figure 1).

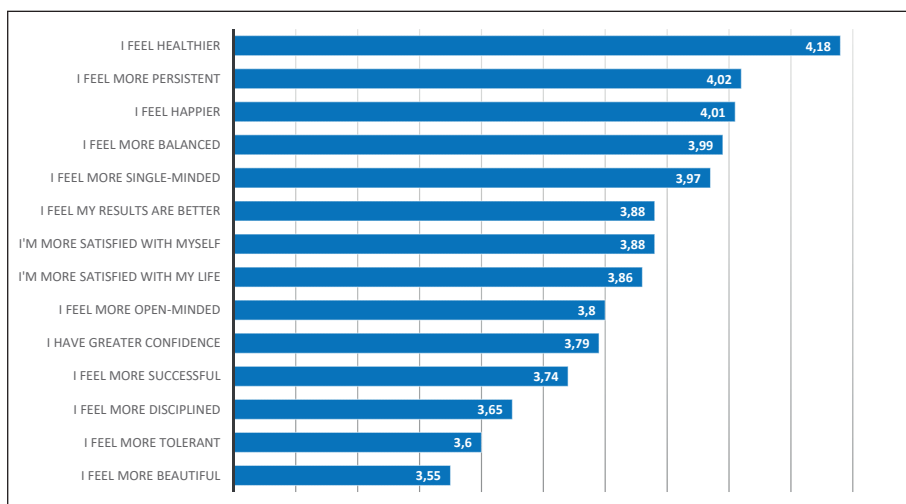
Figure 2 gives an appropriate answer to the question of whether these motivational factors achieve any positive change? Examining the impact of using the opportunities afforded by the Sports Centre, we can conclude that the subjective judgment of the respondents has a positive impact on all aspects. On a scale of 1-5, the average values are above 3.5. Respondents perceive the benefits of sport "on their own skin", both in their private lives and at work. Most obviously, the respondents described the positive changes in the physical state of their body in the first place. However, there is also an improvement in the general mental and psychological state, and the beneficial effects of physical activity in other areas of life (e.g. social relationships).

Another important topic of our study was the assessment of the community-forming significance of sport and the new Sports Centre. The community-building impact was felt at the level of individuals, where respondents were able to spend their free time in good company and become more open to new social rela-





**Figure 1**  
Importance of motivational factors  
Source: Own calculation. N=121. 2019



**Figure 2**  
The impact of sport on the individual on average of the 1-5 Likert scale  
Source: Own calculation. N=121. 2019

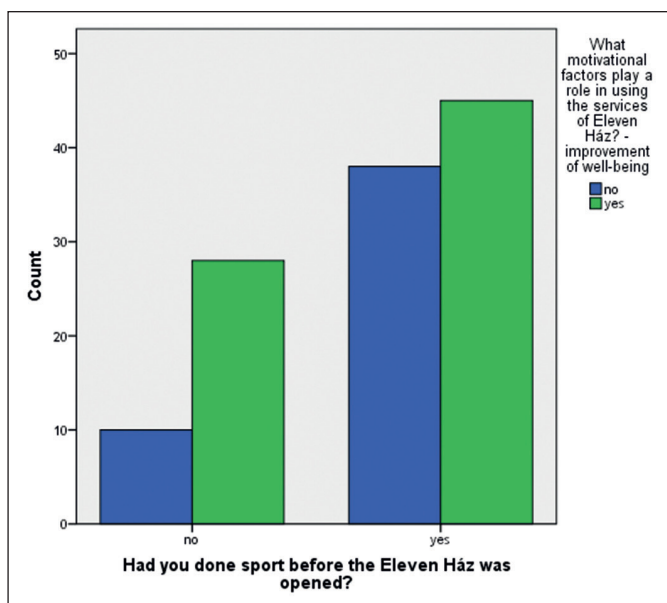
tionships. Most of these, of course, take place within a narrower circle of personal friendships, but larger events can also enhance the feeling of belonging to a larger group. New sport facilities resulted in an average of 9.23 new acquaintances for the interviewees, with the highest marked response reaching 50. Meanwhile, the number of those who did not expand their circle of acquaintances was insignificant.



Respondents rated the role of the “Eleven Ház” in shaping the local community as very significant, representing an average of 4.36 on a 1-5 Likert scale. This means that, according to 50.4% of the responses the activity of the Sports Centre contributes fully to the building of the local community, and only 17.4% judging that its role is neutral and does not contribute to community development at urban level. The perception of the “Eleven Ház” as a new venue was even more positive, with an average response rate of 4.47 and 57.9% of respondents attaching great importance to the organization of events.

### Relationship studies

We have previously highlighted the positive impact of Sports Centre in encouraging a new segment of the population to exercise regularly in the town. This was also evident in the evaluation of the motivational factors, which showed that the increase of self-confidence ( $p=0.016$ ) and the improvement of well-being ( $p=0.042$ ) had a much greater role in the case of non-athletes (Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

The role of the Sports Centre in improving the well-being

Source: Own calculation.  $N=121$ . 2019

Only among them appeared to a considerable extent ( $p=0.027$ ) the significance of banishing boredom, as they introduced a whole new activity into their daily lives. For people who have been active in the past, significant progress has been

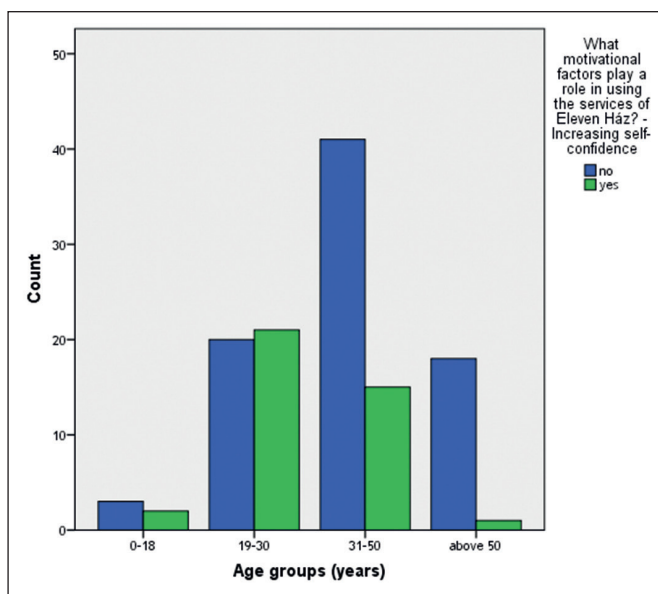


made in being able to perform similar physical activities under better conditions and at a higher standard. On the other hand, they had the opportunity to establish new social relationships through the opportunities offered by the venue and group activities.

The new sport facilities have had a positive impact on both regularly sporting and less active people. The differences between the two groups were generally minimal in terms of the impact of the investment, but had a slightly greater positive impact on previously non-athletes in other areas of life (workplace, community integration).

The main possible motivations for sports (e.g. maintaining health, improving well-being) are emphasized in all social groups irrespective of age. However, a better look and more aesthetic appearance is particularly important for young people in their 20s, while it is less motivating for those over 50 ( $p=0.012$ ). This is even more the case for increasing self-confidence ( $p=0.003$ ), for which a similar relationship can be observed (Figure 4).

Weight loss is important for people between the ages of 20 and 50, while it is less important for those over the age of 50. For the older age groups, besides the more general goals (wellbeing, health preservation, stress relieving), leisure time that is useful in good company and mood is more emphasized.



**Figure 4**

Increasing self-confidence as a motivational factor in responders' age groups

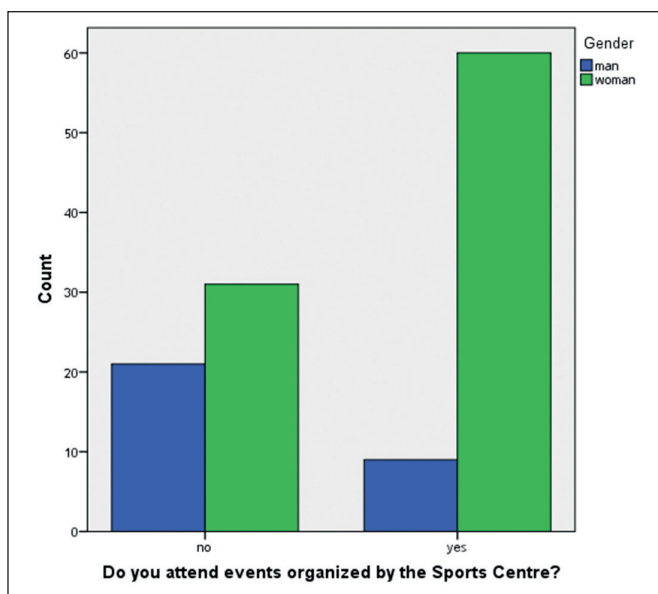
Source: Own calculation. N=121. 2019



We could basically compare the answers of two groups in terms of the highest level of education, since only the number of people with tertiary and secondary education provided the appropriate background. There were hardly any differences between the two groups in the motivation for sports. In the case of effects, the majority of the responses found that the positive impact of sporting activities is higher for group of graduates than for those with a high school education. There was a statistically significant difference in that graduates felt more persistent, balanced, effective and healthier due to sport.

There was no statistically significant difference among the income categories regarding the assessment of motivation factors. Respondents are similarly exposed to the effects of civilization and to sport for similar reasons. At the same time, a smaller difference was seen in the fact that more people indicated higher appearance and better look in the average and higher income groups. At the same time, the increase of self-confidence was mainly focused on lower income groups. Contrary to our previous assumption, the mention of the stress-relieving effect did not increase in parallel with the increase in income, its significance was lower than average in the top category.

Participation in the events organized at the “Eleven Ház” was considered important by women (Figure 5), being much more active in this respect than men



**Figure 5**

Participation in events by gender

Source: Own calculation. N=121. 2019



( $p=0.001$ ,  $\Phi=0.313$ ). There was no significant difference between the age groups in this respect, however, it can be said that the activity of middle-aged people was higher compared to young people. The highest level of education did not influence the distribution of the answers at all.

The proportion of young professionals who can be retained locally is a key factor of the city's competitiveness. There are many factors that influence the satisfaction of inhabitants with their place of residence, but sports services also clearly play a role. The role of the "Eleven Ház" was also viewed positively by respondents. However, due to the influence of other factors (which may be more important), the mean response ( $M=3.97$ ) did not reach four (on a scale of 1 to 5.). And the average response rate for the affected age groups was lower than for the middle-aged.

## CONCLUSIONS

The competitiveness of a region or a settlement is not only determined by the relevant economic performance indicators. It is also very important to take into account the quality of life and the resilience of the population. The human resource base of the area should not be narrowed by emigration or inactivity. At the same time, it is of paramount importance for employers that employees are able to perform consistently at a high level in the workplace. Today's jobs often impose a disproportional, one-sided burden on employees. While there is little chance for movement, the stress is intensified. At the same time, other sources of danger to diseases of civilization are present in people's lives, which is typical not only of the urban population but also of the countryside. The appearance of similar problems induces similar responses. It has become important for the rural adult population to have access to sports facilities. However, economies of scale do not allow this in villages, but in smaller towns it is already possible.

In our case study we show you the positive effects of setting up a new sports center in a small town like Jászárokszállás. The number of residents who are active in sport has increased significantly with new services available locally. As the harms of civilization often reach young people, it has become important for all age groups to preserve health, relieve stress, and improve well-being. In addition, achieving attractive external and increased self-confidence has become more prominent for young people for obvious reasons. These can play an important role both to choose a couple or get a job. Motivations and positive effects of sporting activities showed little variation among different income groups. In the case of highest education level the difference between secondary and tertiary education is already noticeable, because graduates were more aware of their positive effects. In summary, we can say that sport had positive impact not only the direct motivation of the respondents but also other areas of life. So we can reasonably assume that it was recognizable for employers, co-workers, family members and neighbours too.



In our study we could show the significance and positive influence of sport and the Sports Centre not only at the level of individuals, but also in shaping and increasing community activity. The circle of acquaintances and social activity among the respondents who use the services has increased significantly in recent years. A new venue for events has appeared in the town, that filled a gap and improved the overall image of the city for the locals. Similar results can even be a tool to keep young people locally. If the scope of cooperation between the Sports Centre and the employers of the town will be further expanded, it may have direct importance for improving the competitiveness of the town. All in all, sport can play an important role in improving the competitiveness of rural areas. Its positive impact on individuals and communities contributes to making small-town life more attractive, which can be gradually expanded through conscious construction.

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