

Recreation Gaining Ground Among Those in Their Twenties During the COVID-19 Restrictions and Tourism Regression

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Abstract: The coronavirus pandemic in 2019 has brought about a number of drastic economic and social changes. Tourism has been suffering a crisis and restrictions have affected people's everyday lives. The daily free time of the majority has increased, while the opportunities to spend it qualitatively have been reduced, causing several mental and physical issues. The central topic of this research is the progression of recreation in Hungary due to the increase of most people's free time spent alone or with family caused by the restrictions during COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease of 2019), along with the population's fundamental relationship with recreation, and their current tendency of delving into new recreational activities. The research consists of an online questionnaire and two interviews with recreation professionals. The results show that the exploitation of recreation and its spread during the pandemic is a more common phenomenon among the educated, while the majority of the population is less affected by the topic. New recreational habits were picked up by some, however tourism cannot seem to be replaced by other recreational activities. Promoting recreation on a larger scale among Hungarians is of increasing necessity, as many of them do not have a close relationship with it. This article is based on a university thesis, the extract of which was published in a Hungarian scientific journal.

Keywords: Pandemic, Tourism Regression, Free Time, Recreation, Hobby

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease of 2019) pandemic, which emerged at the end of 2019, and is still ongoing, has left its mark on the economy and society both internationally and nationally. One of the largest economic sectors, tourism suffered the most serious damage, it went through a regression even worse than the 2008 global economic crisis. While it contributed roughly 10.4% to the GDP globally in 2019, this has almost halved to 5.5% by 2020 [1]. Due to the successive waves, domestic and global tourism have been characterized by severe fluctuations and uncertainty for approximately 2 years, and within a few months, the number of guest nights in Hungary varied between 100,000 and several million [2]. Serious changes have also taken place in people's everyday lives, such as the transformation of the work schedule, the

introduction of restrictions on going out, the reduction of gatherings and the sudden increase in the number of layoffs at work, due to which the amount of free time has increased significantly for many people, while proper living conditions and the possibility to spend free time in a pleasant way were reduced.

Tourism can contribute to health, work and efficiency, emotional and spiritual well-being, our relationship with family and friends, as well as all aspects of health, by the effect of rest and recreation on the body and spirit, the social experience of contact with tourists and local residents, and the mentally stimulating effect of discovering new landscapes [3, 4]. Ryan claims that the role of tourism in our free time has always been self-regeneration, relaxation, learning and immersion [5]. In addition to this, there is an increasing need for community in the process of achieving well-being [3]. In

our increased free time, the lack of tourism and physical communities may have resulted in other recreational activities coming to the fore, which are perfect inhibitors of mental and physical degradation. Parallel to this, our daily free time has been increasing long-term, between 1986 and 2010, it has grown by 36 minutes among 15-74-year-olds, while the difference is most prominent in the case of 20-29 and 50-74-year-olds [6], therefore the subject of recreation is becoming more and more relevant regardless of the pandemic. According to Retsagi, recreation is „a theoretical and practical response-activity system to specific social challenges [7]”. The WHO declared, that our state of health is revealed by the extent to which we can change or cope with our environment, and for example, those interested in wellness services are more informed about their health, eat consciously, exercise a lot, and look for opportunities to lead a healthier lifestyle [8, 3]. We were given a unique chance to turn our attention inward during this limited period, therefore anyone that discovered and used this opportunity, the additional time caused by the epidemic could have been about getting to know themselves better and trying new things. Our previous fast and crowded lifestyle has been replaced by a slower-paced one, mostly spent at home, alone or with family, which requires self-discipline and self-awareness. Reichlin states in his note, that the scheduling of free time affects the person themselves, and shapes their personality [9], therefore it becomes an important question how we spend our everyday lives. Unfortunately, among the four types of leisure behaviors in Hungary, passive is the most common, about which we can read in Tibori's book, they are the ones that do not do anything in their free time, perhaps they watch television, do housework, or go to the bar. He also believes that „people are not prepared to spend the increased amount of time that has changed in its content [10]”. Fritz asks the thrilling question: why does some kind of tragedy have to happen for us to make vows and change our lifestyle? [11]”.

The purpose of this research is to examine a correlation that may be interesting in sociological and psychological terms. Has the increase of free time spent alone or with our family due to the restrictions and tourism regression caused by COVID-19 resulted in a wider spread of recreation among the Hungarian population? The research also discusses the population's relationship with recreation, the mapping of possible newly picked up recreational activities, and whether other recreational activities proved to be suitable substitutes for tourism during the pandemic. Gosi deals with a similar topic in his book chapter, where he reveals that during this period, primarily those with a sporty lifestyle and the educated spent more time on recreational pursuits, of which we can find some examples as well. It also turned out that these applicants missed social activities during the pandemic, and complained about the difficulty of scheduling due to the absence of external restrictions. Regarding the decrease in cultural recreation opportunities, he also found, among other things, a large increase in the time devoted to watching movies and television at home, as well as the fact that more people engaged in self-education and language learning, and to a

greater extent [12].

Personal trainer Zoltan Varga also dealt with this topic in his article series, in which he mentions the increase of time spent uselessly as one of the negative effects of COVID-19 on our everyday lives – „time often slips out of our hands without having used it for anything useful” –, and he provides help to his readers in this regard, in active terms [13].

2. Methods

During the research of the topic, two types of sampling took place, an online questionnaire and two interviews, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Regarding the questionnaire, all age groups were addressed using convenience sampling, and the survey was anonymous. The topics are the change in the amount of the population's free time, their relationship with recreation, the possible immersion in new activities, and the demand for tourism. The results are analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. In the case of the interviews, two outstanding experts in recreation, Dr. habil. Peter Fritz and Dr. Gyongyver Lacza participated, which took place over telephone calls, with different, structured questions. With Fritz, the topics discussed were mainly the growth of leisure time, the progression of recreation, its importance, recommended methods, and the population's relationship with recreation, while with Lacza, those were the spending of leisure time, tourism as a recreational activity, and the popularity of recreation.

3. Results

The questionnaire was filled out by a total of 151, mostly university student respondents, of which 75.5% were 18-25-year-olds, and 16.6% were 26-35-year-olds, due to limited access, therefore this part of the research does not provide a comprehensive picture of the trends in the entire population. Based on the responses of this narrower age group, firstly we found out that mainly due to online education and home office, the free time of 62.9% of the respondents indeed increased by 1-2 hours per day, and for the majority, by more than 2 hours per day. According to their statements, 60.3% of the respondents spent more time doing recreational activities after the onset of the pandemic than before. 53 respondents engaged in new recreational activities during this period. The activities most people took up were primarily creative, such as cooking and baking, painting, singing, embroidery, hair braiding, knitting, drawing, video editing, doing make-up, photography and making decorations. Active, sports activities, such as running, hiking, going to the gym, gymnastics, yoga, cycling, and rowing were also popular. Among the primarily intellectual activities, reading, language learning, video and board games, expanding skin care knowledge and learning to play an instrument were typical. Finally, for relaxation, some people watched movies, series and videos, while others meditated. It also turned out that the vast majority of those surveyed, i. e. roughly 85% consider these new activities to be permanent in their lives.

Regarding the meaning of recreation, the vast majority had the right idea, and there are plenty of overlaps between individual definitions. The responses were analyzed in categories, based on keywords. There was a mix of responses about what the concept might mean, in what forms they participate in it, and what recreation results in. The most popular keywords were the following: rest, free time, recharge, relaxation, exercise, sport, refreshment. In the case of the most frequently used expressions, approximately 10-30 people agreed, for example, the expression „rest” was included in the answer of 33 respondents. Other relatively common or at least once-occurring thoughts were the balance and integrity of the body and soul, stress and tension relief, renewal, restoration, self-improvement, health, pleasure, healing, counterbalancing negativity and duties, breaking away from everyday life, own interests, me-time, and productivity. In the case of those describing specific activities, we received the following ideas: reading books, playing games, spending time with family,

friends and our partner, swimming, sunbathing, watching movies and series, studying, cycling, exercising, hiking, traveling, walking (the dog), painting nails, cooking and baking, sleeping. There were roughly 10 answers that could not be evaluated, and a few wrong thoughts. One of these were, for example rehabilitation and recovery, which refer to the restoration of some type of lost physical ability, and are not to be confused with recreation. Many people also think that recreation only means exercise, sports, and active pastime, not counting in mental activities or the recharging power of idle rest. Another misconception was „mapping”, which is a mathematical term, „making a copy”, „action after perception”, which can correspond to the definition of reaction, and „recreating something old”. In another question, we also got a comprehensive picture of how popular each recreational opportunity is these days, regardless of the pandemic, these are shown in Figure 1.

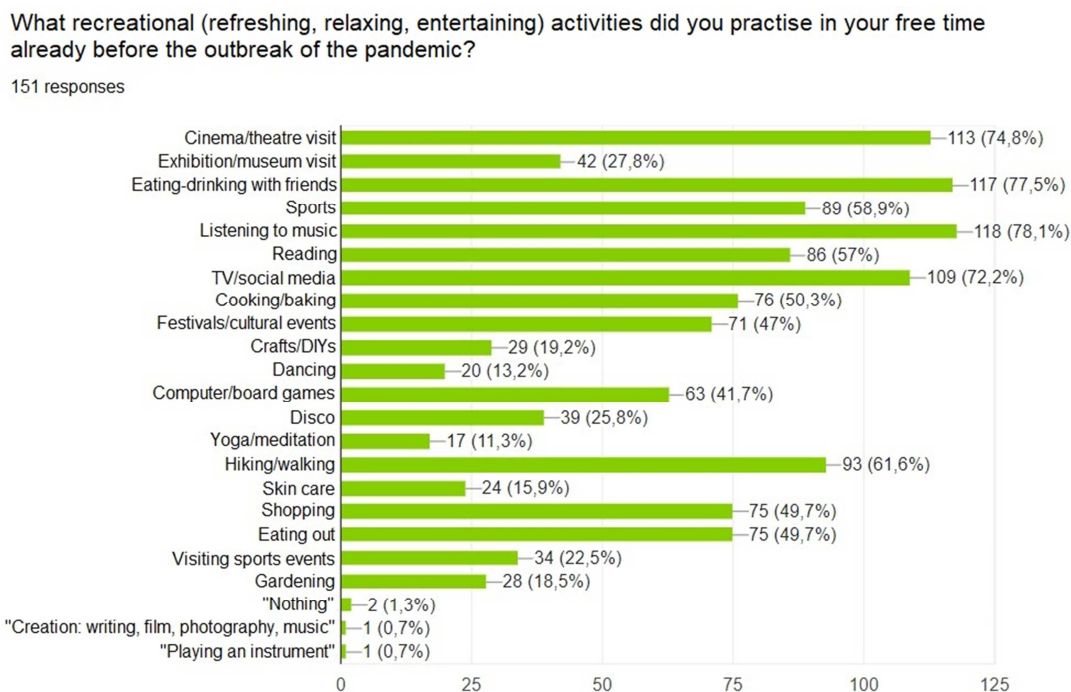


Figure 1. Pre-pandemic Popularity of Recreational Activities [12].

Communities are clearly important to our respondents, as well as tourism, which, to some extent, they find more important than other types of recreational pursuits (Figure 2), and its absence had a negative impact on 55.6% of them. Finally, our respondents are uncertain about whether they can replace leisure travel with other recreational activities – to some, they deemed a satisfactory solution, to others, they did not, while 55% could not decide. Presumably, the uncertainty stems from the fact that the majority, if given a choice, would not be willing to exchange the experience of tourism for another service, or they do not have adequate knowledge to choose a satisfactory activity as replacement.

During the interview with Peter Fritz, the research result of our free time increase was confirmed, however, according to

my interlocutor, the time spent on recreation did not necessarily increase in parallel. The way Fritz sees it, the majority of Hungarian residents do not care about their mental and physical health, and presumably do not really know what recreation means. It was an important statement, that the fact that we have more free time is not enough in itself for more people to engage in recreation to a greater extent, participation in such activities has become more frequent primarily for those who had already been interested in this topic. He explained why recreation is important with its countless positive effects, and that he finds its two types, mental and physical recreation, equally useful. Regarding specific activities, Fritz primarily recommends simpler forms of exercise, such as walking, and considers it important to

complement the attention paid to our health with screening tests and proper nutrition. According to his insights, the opportunities for physical recreation have reduced during the pandemic, however for mental recreation they have not. Business trips were greatly reduced, and domestic tourism came to the fore, while in connection with all of this, the issue of environmental pollution was also discussed. Fritz believes that we have a fundamental need for tourism, and that such an

activity that could replace the experience of travel does not quite exist. Regarding recreation gaining popularity, he believes that the majority of the population did not adapt to the difficulties caused by COVID-19, and with the narrowing of the supply, many are actually experiencing recreation less than before. Fritz suggests that in order to spread recreation, the quality of higher education courses should be improved, and the public's ignorance should be reduced [14].

Generally, in your free time, would you rather travel or practise relaxing/refreshing activities at home?

151 responses

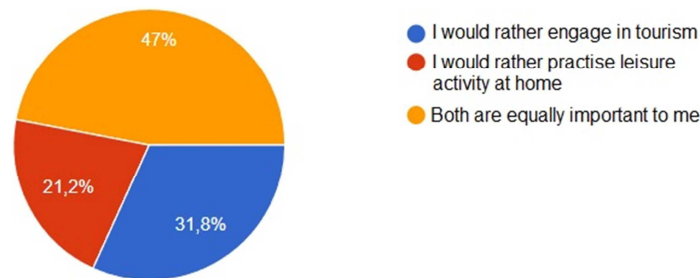


Figure 2. Tourism Versus Other Recreational Activities [13].

During my conversation with Gyongyver Lacza, it turned out that we spend most of our free time in front of the screen, social life and leisure sports only come after that in order of importance. She believes that few people have a sense of free time, and the majority do not know how to schedule it properly. According to Lacza's insights, the amount of our free time does not particularly affect the quality of spending it, therefore, once again, we came to the conclusion that attitude and competence are what really matter. In addition, she emphasizes that spending free time qualitatively causes a pleasant experience, therefore anyone that is able to recognize their needs and takes steps for them, will experience recreation. She also explains that communities have a kind of motivational pull in recreation, therefore it is worth thinking in communities when forming our own activities. Tourism is an important and popular activity according to Lacza as well, primarily because of the change of environment, and new experiences, and she believes that people experienced its regression as a serious loss. Outdoor recreation appeared as a substitute, and the appreciation of domestic tourism was discussed here as well, furthermore, that business travelers have more free time due to the epidemic, which can be seen as positive. The popularity of recreation is generally increasing, for example, there is a stable market for physical activities – although less for cultural services – and Lacza's opinion is that recreation gaining popularity mainly depends on the residents' own decisions and opportunities. She believes that the population's lack of motivation and resources are the main obstacles in its spread, and in terms of supply, infrastructural problems and the lack of professionals. In Lacza's opinion, the pandemic had a negative effect on us both mentally and physically, and she believes that only a certain segment of the population had more opportunities to immerse themselves in

recreation during this period, however many of them took advantage of this indeed. My interlocutor's final conclusion is that overall, recreation has not become more popular during COVID-19, and that we need to learn to manage our free time regardless of its amount [15].

4. Conclusion

The correlation raised at the beginning of the research, that the possible increase in free time spent independently or with our family due to the restrictions and tourism regression caused by COVID-19 resulted in the spread of recreation in a wider circle among the Hungarian population, can be accepted, since according to the answers to the questionnaire, there were more people who were more involved in recreational activities during this period, and plenty of them also widened the scope of their recreational activities. However, it is essential to state that the sample of the questionnaire is not representative, and according to our recreation experts, regardless of the increase in leisure time, this was most likely not the trend in the entirety of the population. It is also important to note, that the proportion of the population might also be significant, whose free time either did not increase or, if it did, their opportunities or motivation decreased, therefore they did not show a particularly greater interest in recreation during this period. Overall, the population as a whole was not characterized by a faster spread of recreation during the epidemic.

Regarding the results, it can be stated that regardless of the amount of free time we have, there are just enough obstacles for recreation to spread properly among people. The subject clearly receives less attention than it deserves, considering that it is for our health, and is an everyday phenomenon with many positive effects. In order for this sector to receive more

attention, it would be worthwhile to improve education and spread its importance and potential in schools. In addition, the sense of free time should be promoted, it would be necessary to effectively develop people's time management skills and ways of spending their free time from an early age, so that time can become a resource instead of an excuse. It would also be beneficial to draw attention to the "sucking effect" of social media, and to somehow individually reduce its availability, or the amount of time spent using it, since it is a huge obstacle to spending free time qualitatively, especially among young people. Considering that one of the biggest problems is clearly the lack of motivation, it would be of great benefit to the population to organize as many motivating events as possible, sports days and free opportunities, where the participants can do something they might have never done before. Reward systems are also highly useful, such as the various active programs that we can participate in as a substitute to a university physical education class. In connection to this, it is also worth using the pulling power of community, since we prefer to participate in a program where people with similar taste, our own age group, or our friends are also present. Last, but not least, the appropriate training and promotion of professionals, the emphasis on the benefits of their duties, and the infrastructural development of the availability of recreational supply should not be neglected. It would be worthwhile to conduct research on this topic on a wider scale, with a larger sample, in order to apply the obtained information to the entire population.

All possible tools should be provided to the population so that they can become masters of spending their own free time and get the most out of themselves, this is an individual, social and economic interest at the same time. It would be of great benefit to all of us if, by deploying the appropriate tools, we would spread recreation also among those less involved, thereby advancing their personal development, and creating a happier, more conscious and proactive society.

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