

Youth Snowboard in an Intercultural Perspective

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Introduction

Sport is generally considered an important subculture in society and with a global value.¹⁵ Snowboard originates from surfing, developed in the 1960s and was introduced to the Olympic family in 1998.¹⁶ What attracts children and youth to snowboard? How could the sport be described and its popularity explained? Are there criteria in common no matter cultural identities or diversities? The main purpose of this study was to define snowboard characteristics, describe its practitioners and to explain its attractiveness to the growing generation in an intercultural perspective.

Method

The Trofeo Topolino (TT), an event generally recognised as the unofficial world championships for children and youth organised by the Disney Corporation, was chosen as an arena to meet young snowboarders when competing. Data were collected at the 2004 TT taking place in Folgarida, Italy, March 2-6. The investigated disciplines were halfpipe (hp) and snowboardcross (sbx). The study involved a total of 152 riders - 109 boys and 43 girls - representing 21 nations from Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand. The number of participants varied by nation. The youngsters were grouped by gender and age, youth born 1987-89, kids born 1990 and later. Riders were asked to fill in a questionnaire in English. 76% responded the questionnaire.

Results

The investigated group consisted of 65 % boys and 35% girls. 22% of all riders were born during the first quarter of the year compared to 17% being born during the fourth quarter of a year. As the variation in speed of physical growth is 5-6 chronological years within the sexes there is a possibility that age-grouping as a base for the dividing in competition classes might disfavour late developers.¹⁷ Boys became members of sport clubs at the age of 6 compared to girls at the age of 7. Dominant debut sports among both sexes were soccer and alpine skiing. Parents were considered as prime influents to organised sport. 58% of the investigated boys and 66% of the girls were involved with 3 or more sports on a parallel basis. 72% of all girls had dropped out from one or more sports since their sport club debut compared to 70% among the boys. Boredom and/or negative coach experiences were the most common reasons for having done so. 67% of the studied female riders and 72% of the studied male riders had most or all of their friends within the sportive context. Girls involved themselves later than boys with snowboard – at the age of 10 compared to at the age of 8. 53% of the boys and 62% of the girls considered themselves highly competitive. Girls were to a larger extent more apt to win than to boys – 76% compared to 60%. 40% of the boys and 23% of the girls had sponsors who strongly contributed to expenses for the equipment. With reference to favourite leisure-time activities, girls more often spend their time with friends and listened to music compared to boys whereas computers and TV/video meant more to boys. However, boys and girls spent equal amount of time - 1,6 hours per day - watching regular television programmes.

Discussion

The results revealed that snowboard to a large extent meets the expectations of children and youth. Riders in particular enjoyed to learn new tricks according to their own levels of skills and performance? This is well in line with previous research emphasising favourable social interactive environments when doing sports.¹⁸ Riders wanted new challenges of various kinds, to perceive their body in motion and to improve

¹⁵ Carlson, R. (2000). Sport Science and Sport for All. Key-note address. Asiana Sport for All Organization 6th Congress. Pusan, Korea.

¹⁶ Fabbro, M. (1996). Snowboarding. The Ultimate Freeride, pp. 5-7. McClelland & Stewart. Toronto, Canada.

Malina, R. & Bouchard, C. (1991). Growth, maturation and Physical Activity, pp 445-446. Human Kinetics. Champaign, Illinois, USA.

¹⁸ Bredemeier, B. & Shields, D. (1994). Character Development and Physical Activity, p. 219. Human Kinetics. Champaign, Illinois, USA.

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their levels of skills on their own terms in encouraging environments. Nature offers the exploration of elements that traditional sport seldom does. Boys were furthermore more active than girls in snowboard. This is well in line with DeKnop & Engström & Skirstad & Weiss findings stating that the most common motives for taking part in sports are intrinsic values like enjoyment and social reasons.¹⁹ A great majority of the investigated youngsters were involved with other sports parallel to snowboard. When there was a time problem, snowboard was however given priority. Similar results were found in a Norwegian study by Sisjord.²⁰ The investigated riders were furthermore very eager to win and highly competitive. This is well in line with previous research on Olympic medallists or international champions.²¹ There are good reasons to believe that a broad engagement with sports favoured motor learning and development. A large proportion of both boys and girls had dropped out of organised sport. Prime reasons for having done so were related to personal perceptions of how activities is training and competition were organised and conducted as well as to criteria to be referred to as counselling or coach-performer relationships. The results pointed out the importance of positive experiences and perceptions in these matters. Interpersonal relationships are of particular importance among children when discussing the concept coach-performer. Strategies of significance include communication, the developing and maintaining of self-confidence as well as reward patterns.²² An interesting aspect of snowboard is the concept of freedom and to perform on your own conditions. A little over 80% of the riders meant that to freeride just for fun when snowboarding was highly appealing in snowboard. Reichenfeld & Breuchert points out that riding in powder is one of the most greatest joys of snowboarding.²³ Possibilities to improvise and to challenge personal capacities together with friends often took place in a “snowboardpark” – an arena with rails, jumps of different sizes where riders could form their own “lines”. The impact of “snowboardparks” were pointed out in a study by Christensen.²⁴

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¹⁹ De Knop, P. & Engström, L-M. & Skirstad, B. & Weiss, M. (1996). *Worldwide Trends in Youth Sports*, p. 276. Human Kinetics. Champaign, Illinois, USA.

²⁰ Sisjord, M-K. (1998). *Gender and Snowboarding*. Paper presented at the XIV World Congress of Sociology, Montreal, Canada.

²¹ Carlson, R. (2001). *Ethnicity and Social Diversity in Youth – example Sweden*. Paper presented at the SMAANTZ Congress. Melbourne, Australia.

²² Lee, M. (ed. 1997). *Coaching Children in Sport – Principles and Practice*, p. 179. E & FN SPON. London, England.

²³ Reichenfeld, R. & Breuchert, A. (1995). *Snowboarding*. Outdoor Pursuits Series, p. 122. Human Kinetics. Champaign, Illinois, USA.

²⁴ Christensen, O. (2001). *Absolutt snowboard. Studier i sidelengs ungdomskulturer. (Absolute Snowboard. Studies of Youth Cultures)*. Series of dissertations no 118. Faculty of Arts. University of Oslo, Norway.