

Evolution Of Most Practiced Sports In Catalonia (2005–2014)

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Aim of the research

The aim of the present study was to describe the evolution of most practiced sports in Catalonia from 2005 to 2014.

Literature review

The growth in informal sport participation in health and fitness-related activities and the decline in more traditional team sports is a trend that has been widely documented across Europe (Harris, Nichols, & Taylor, 2017). Knowledge about sport practice and reasons for practising sport among the general population can lead to appropriate strategic decisions about the sports phenomenon. Closely monitoring the evolution of sport practice can enhance social agents to make the most appropriate decisions according to the information obtained.

In the specific case of Catalonia, sport practice has gradually increased during the last decade, from a 43.0% of general population practising sport in 2005 to 43.5% in 2010, and reaching 45.6% in 2014, as gathered in the last report from the Catalan Sports Observatory (Puig, Camps, Andrés, Sánchez, Mateu, & Cusí, 2017).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

A community sample from Catalonia, which is at least 15 years old, was randomly recruited through stratified sampling procedure. Inclusion criteria was to practise sport at the time of the study. Data was collected in 2005 (n = 1,286), 2010 (n = 811), and 2014 (n = 393) by means of face-to-face interviews that took place at participants' homes by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS, 2014).

Results, discussion and implications

The most practiced sports in 2005 were mainly leisure-oriented, being swimming the most practised sport (41.23%), followed by recreational cycling (21.1%) and fitness training at a sport center (17.2%). In 2010, the percentage of people who swam significantly decreased to 27.9%, whereas cycling remained steady (19.3%) and football (16.7%) was included in the three most practised sports. Finally, in 2014, swimming was again the most practised sport (24.0%) but the increased popularity of running during the last years was reflected by data, with the 19.6% of the population reported running, in comparison to the 8.5% of people who ran in 2005. It has to be highlighted that mountaineering, trekking and hiking reached the third position (15.6%) in 2014.

The main reason for practising sport along the period studied was to do physical exercise, being reported by the 65.4% of the sample in 2014. It has to be noted that the rate of people considering the improvement and maintenance of health as one of the main reasons for engaging in sport has increased from 37.1% in 2005 to 52.5% in 2014. Less than 4% of participants reported doing sport because they enjoyed competition. Moreover, the lack of time (34.6%) was the main reason for not practising sport. Motivations to practice were similar when comparing different sports performance, being more focused on improving health in the case of swimming, but on doing physical activity and having fun in the case of running, and mountaineering, respectively.

The present study provides a description of the evolution of the most practised sports in Catalonia, focused on both the type of sport and the reasons to practice. The longitudinal analysis revealed that recreational swimming was the most practiced sport during the period studied. The increased popularity of running during the last years has lead this sport to the second position of most practised sport in Catalonia, which indicates that individual activities are those mainly practised among the population. Knowledge about population sport practice and motivations for practising can be a useful tool for public and private entities to make strategic decisions in terms of sport practice promotion, business development, or identifying special needs in sport facilities, among others. In this regard, and stated by Hallman, Wicker, Breuer, & Schönherr (2012), sport participation is not only influenced by socioeconomic factors, but by the presence of different types of sport infrastructure. Results from the present study show the non-competitive aim of practice, basically aimed to do physical activity and improving health. Consequently, health seems to be a key message for participants when promoting sport practice, which could be taken into consideration by municipalities and sport government bodies when developing and implementing physical activity and sport policies.

References

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