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## Article

# The profile of leisure time sports people and their reason for doing sport in Spanish sports facilities

European Journal of Government and Economics (EJGE)

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*Suggested Citation:* Grimaldi Puyana, Moises; Gálvez-Ruiz, Pablo; Valcarce-Torrente, Manel; Bernal-García, Ainara (2020) : The profile of leisure time sports people and their reason for doing sport in Spanish sports facilities, European Journal of Government and Economics (EJGE), ISSN 2254-7088, Universidade da Coruña, A Coruña, Vol. 9, Iss. 2, pp. 210-219, <https://doi.org/10.17979/ejge.2020.9.2.5846>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/298624>

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# ***European Journal of Government and Economics***

Vol.9 • No.2  
2020  
ISSN: 2254-7088

*Special Issue. The Role of Institutions and Governance in Sport*



Servizo de Publicacións  
UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA



Number 9, issue 2, June 2020

Special Issue. The Role of Institutions and Governance in Sport

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17979/ejge.2020.9.2>

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## The profile of leisure time sports people and their reason for doing sport in Spanish sports facilities

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**Article history.** Received 16 December 2019; first revision required 22 April 2020; accepted 18 June 2020.

**Abstract.** In Spanish sports habits, there exists a clear increase of the institutionalised sports practice and a distinct trend of leisure and recreational sport. This motivates the current work as it is necessary to go deeply into the knowledge of this practice. The aims proposed are twofold. On the one hand, to perform an analysis of the profile and the characteristics of the behaviour of the users of sports centres and leisure and recreational sportspeople. And, on the other hand, to study the motives of leisure/recreational sports practice. A descriptive quantitative methodology has been followed in this research. The description of the profile of users emerges from the data analysed as well as that they practise sport for exotelic reasons. The results obtained can serve managers to orientate their strategies destined to satisfy the needs of these users.

**Keywords.** leisure sport; motives for practice; profile; recreation

**JEL Codes.** Z0

**DOI.** <https://doi.org/10.17979/ejge.2020.9.2.5846>

### 1. Introduction

From a humanist perspective, we understand leisure as an essential part of human development, affecting it as a personal experience and revealed via numerous practices according to the environment and its resources, and the demographic and social context (Lazcano and Ortuzar, 2016; Cuenca, 2000). According to Cuenca, Aguilar and Ortega (2010), this leisure can be expressed in two directions, negative or positive, both having two areas of action. The negative version of leisure is considered to be absent leisure (a personal absence of experiences) or harmful leisure (detrimental experiences, both personal and social). We can in turn differentiate the positive version of leisure between exotelic leisure (practised as a means to achieve a goal) and autotelic leisure (true, which is done for itself, without a specific aim).

Taking into account the perspective of sport as leisure and adapting it to the theory described of the concept of humanistic leisure (Aristegui-Fradua and Silvestre-Cabrera, 2012), and understanding this type of positive leisure from a double functionality as different authors describe (Cuenca *et al.*, 2010) means: sport as exotelic leisure (as the sports practice of

recreational leisure to achieve a goal and not as an end in itself) and sport as autotelic leisure (referring to recreational/leisure practice sports which is done satisfactorily without a utilitarian purpose).

According to these premises, we note that in the surveys of Spanish sports habits there is a clear increase in disinstitutionalised sports practice and a distinct trend to leisure and recreational sport (García-Ferrando and Llopis-Goig, 2017). In the Andalusian context and for the first time, the Law 5/2016 of Sport in Andalusia, defined “Sport of Leisure and Recreation” as “*Physical activity which is done in an organisation or outside it, and aimed at achieving non-competitive aims related with the improvement of health, acquiring sports habits, as well as the active occupation of free time*”. This places the sportsperson outside competition and having an evident orientation towards motivations intrinsic to the individual.

Since 2009, a growing evolution has been noted of people who say that they practice sport in Europe, and according to the European Commission (2018) the proportion of people doing so increased from 42 % to 46 % in all the continent. In Spain, and according to the Survey of Sports Habits (CSD, 2015), 46.2 % of people over 15 years old, practice sport at least once a week, and in reference to the sector of gyms and Fitness, we find that 40% of the population in our country are enrolled in a centre of this type (EuropeActive and Deloitte, 2019).

A reflection of sports practice is the users' spending in sports-linked services. The 2019 Sports Statistics Yearbook elaborated by the Ministry of Culture and Sport states that in 2017 the annual spending in specific sports-linked goods by Spanish households was 5,686.5 million euros, which represents 1.1% of their total spending in goods and services. The average spending per household in sports-linked goods and services was 307.2 euros, and the average spending per person was 123.4 euros. This yearbook highlights that the most significant sports-linked spending corresponds to *recreational and sports services*, 79.2%. As appears from the results obtained, the average spending per person in this type of goods is higher than the average in the Autonomous Communities of Aragón, the Principality of Asturias, the Balearic Islands, Cantabria, Catalonia, the Valencian Community, the Community of Madrid, the Region of Murcia, Navarre and the Basque Country. Analysing the indicators of the evolution of the prices of specific sports-linked products, obtained from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) Base 2016 statistics (INE), the results available indicate that the CPI of *recreational and sports services* has increased by 0.6 points while that of *large sports equipment* has decreased by 2 points compared with 2017, the increase being 1.7 points in the National CPI.

Likewise, the 2019 Yearbook of Sports Statistics provides information on the profiles of the users who carry out sports practices (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sports habits according to personal characteristics (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2018).

	In percentage of the population analysed		In percentage of the population who do sport	
	In the last year	At least once a week	In the last year	At least once a week
Total	53.5	46.2	100	86.3
Gender				
Male	59.8	50.4	100	84.3
Female	47.5	42.1	100	88.6
Age				
From 15 to 19 years	87.0	81.5	100	93.7
From 20 to 24 years	78.2	71.0	100	90.9
From 25 to 34 years	72.6	62.5	100	86.0
From 35 to 44 years	64.6	54.0	100	83.5
From 45 to 54 years	53.2	44.9	100	84.4
From 55 to 64 years	44.5	37.4	100	83.9
From 65 to 74 years	30.0	27.0	100	90.1
From 74 and over	10.9	9.6	100	88.0
Level of studies				
First stage of secondary school or less	38.8	33.4	100	85.9
Second stage of secondary school	63.1	53.7	100	85.2
Higher education or equivalent	73.4	64.1	100	87.3
Work situation				
Working	65.5	55.9	100	85.4
Unemployed	54.4	45.2	100	83.1
Retired	23.5	20.4	100	86.5
Student	85.2	78.2	100	91.8
Household tasks	27.8	24.7	100	89.1
Others	38.7	32.9	100	85.1

On the other hand, and addressing the Spanish population's reasons for doing sport (Table 2), the following results are noted. Firstly, "to be fit" with 29.9% (32.7% women compared to 27.6% men), second "fun or entertainment" with 23% of the cases (27% men and 18.4% women), third "health reasons" with 14.8%, fourth "a way to relax" with 13.7%, stronger in women than in men; fifth "he/she likes doing sport", stronger in men than in women (11.9%), and with lower rates "as a form of social relation" (2.6%); "for personal growth" (1.8%), "he/she likes to compete" (1.5%) and "by profession" (0.7%).

**Table 2.** Distribution of the Spanish population for reasons of doing sport (CSD, 2015).

Order	Reason	%	Population	Leisure or recreational sport
1	To be fit	29.9	6,053,615.8	-
2	Fun or entertainment	23.1	4,676,873.7	-
3	Health reasons	14.8	2,996,438.6	-
4	A way to relax	13.7	2,773,730.3	-
5	He/she likes doing sport	11.9	2,409,298.6	-
6	As a form of social relation	2.6	526,401.4	-
7	For personal growth	1.8	364,431.7	19,800,790.1
8	He/she likes to compete	1.5	202,463.6	-
9	By profession	0.7	141,723.4	344,187.0
Total		100	20,144,977.2	

**Note.** Spanish population over 15 years old.

Likewise, different recent authors and studies confirm the type of sports practice analysed in Table 2, oriented towards the view of leisure as a positive factor in people and society, be it exotelic or autotelic. The great majority of the participants of these studies consider doing sport with non-competitive aims, focused on improving health, improving their physical or mental level, or questions related with personal image, self-esteem and relations among people (Elasri *et al.*, 2016; García-Fernández *et al.*, 2017; Moreno-Murcia *et al.*, 2016; Valcarce-Torrente, 2016).

## **2. Aim**

As described above, the present work has a double aim. Firstly, to carry out an analysis of the profile and the characteristics of the behaviour of leisure time and recreation sports people users of sports centres. Secondly, to study their reasons for doing sport, differentiating those who do sport as a means of recreational leisure from those who do so as an end in itself.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Procedure**

This cross-sectional study used non-probability convenience sampling. The participants were 1,050 users (426 men and 624 women) users of 52 sports centres belonging to eight large chains in Spain. Those who agreed to collaborate in the study were informed of the study's objectives, their voluntary and anonymous participation, in addition to an assurance of the confidentiality of the answers. They then completed the consent form prior to being provided with the link to access the online questionnaire. The participants responded to the questionnaire in about 10–12 min to complete all the items. The data collection was carried out during the months of January 2018 to April 2018.

### **3.2. Measures**

An online seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to measure the role of Reasons for leisure sportspeople practicing physical activity. The questionnaire initially consisted of 50 items, was used for data collection was composed of a socio-demographic section (gender, age, education level and Marital Status) and a section of characteristics of the behavior of leisure/recreation sportspeople formed by five variables: type of sports facility, Permanence and previous experience, Frequency and time use of the sport facility, spending on sports services and products in percentages

### **3.3. Data analysis**

A descriptive quantitative methodology has been followed in this investigation. For this, the SPSS V23 program was used for the analysis of the results, and the data were presented in percentages (profile and expense), averages and standard deviations (reasons for practice).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Profile of the users

Firstly, regarding the profile of the users of the sports facilities studied, the analysis of the data reveals that they are mainly either between 21-30 years old (27.0%;  $n = 284$ ) or are over 60 years old (20.9%;  $n = 219$ ) and single (47.6%;  $n = 500$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Distribution of the sample by age and marital status.

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 21 years old	95	9.0
	21-30 years old	284	27.0
	31-40 years old	146	13.9
	41-50 years old	176	16.8
	51-60 years old	130	12.4
	Over 60 years old	219	20.9
	Total	1,050	100.0
Marital Status	Single	500	47.6
	Married	432	41.1
	Divorced	61	5.8
	Widow/er	17	1.6
	DK/DA	40	3.9
	Total	1,050	100.0

As to the level of studies, 38.5% were graduates and only 5.5% did not have studies or only had primary studies (Table 4). The analysis of the level of income variable establishes that the sample is characterised by having mainly low incomes; in fact, 43.9% do not surpass 250 euros ( $n = 461$ ).

**Table 4.** Level of studies.

		Frequency	Percentage
Level of studies	Without studies	9	.9
	Primary studies	49	4.7
	Secondary studies	167	15.9
	Undergraduate course	97	9.2
	Higher technical certificate	156	14.9
	Degree	404	38.5
	Doctorate	15	1.4
	University Master	117	11.1
	DK/DA	36	3.4
	Total	1,050	100.0



**Table 5.** Level of net monthly incomes.

		Frequency	Percentage
Income	0-250€	461	43.9
	251-500€	48	4.6
	501-750€	56	5.3
	751-1,000€	81	7.7
	1,001-1,500€	104	9.9
	1,501-2,000€	90	8.6
	2,001-2,500€	64	6.1
	2,501-3,000€	17	1.6
	Over 3,000	20	1.9
	DK/DA	109	10.4
Total	1,050	100.0	

#### 4.2. Characteristics of the behavior of leisure/recreation sportspeople

Centring our analysis on the characteristics which define the behaviour of the leisure/recreation user, it is established that 52.1% of the customers chose a Private Gym as sports installation ( $n = 547$ ) (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Level of net monthly incomes.

		Frequency	Percentage
Type of facility	Privately managed Municipal Centre	199	19.0
	Publicly managed Municipal Centre	101	9.6
	Private gym	547	52.1
	DK/DA	203	19.3
	Total	1,050	100.0

Addressing if the user had been enrolled before in another sports installation, 62.1% ( $n = 652$ ) of them had been customers of another installation. As to the permanence in the sports centre, 34.5% indicated that they had been a user for more than 2 years ( $n = 362$ ) (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Permanence and previous experience.

		Frequency	Percentage
Permanence	Less than 3 months	202	19.2
	3-6 months	178	17.0
	6-12 months	121	11.5
	1-2 years	187	17.8
	More than 2 years	362	34.5
	Total	1,050	100.0
Previous experience	No	319	30.4
	Yes, in the same centre	79	7.5
	Yes, in another centre	652	62.1
	Total	1,050	100.0

With relation to the frequency, 39.1% of the users declared that they went three times a week, 36.7% more than four times a week, 16.9% twice a week and 7.9% less than once a

week. Secondly, regarding the time of use, 57.8% declared having stayed in the centre between 60 and 90 minutes, 26% between 30 and 60 minutes and 19% more than 90 minutes (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Frequency and time use of the sport facilities.

		Frequency	Percentage
Frequency	Less than once a week	30	2.9
	Once a week	47	4.5
	Twice a week	177	16.9
	Three times a week	411	39.1
	More than four times a week	385	36.6
	Total	1,050	100
Time of use	Less than 30 minutes	3	.3
	30 - 60 min	241	23.0
	60 - 90 min	607	57.7
	More than 90 min	199	19.0
	Total	1,050	100.0

Regarding spending in sports practice, we find that greater percentages are in personal trainers, sportswear, sports shoes and sports nutrition (50€-300€/year), as follows: 50€/year on sports nutrition (59.6%), personal trainers (59.3%), sportswear (31.7%) sports shoes (30.8%); 50-100€/year on sports shoes (43.1%) and sports nutrition (24.3%); while 101-300€/year on sports shoes (21.5%), sportswear (18.9%), sports nutrition (7.4%) and personal trainers (1.3%) (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Spending on sports services and products in percentages.

Spending	Personal trainers	Sportswear	Sport shoes	Sports nutrition
Less than 50€/year	59.3	31.7	30.8	59.6
50-100€/year	0.6	41.7	43.1	24.3
101-300€/year	1.3	18.9	21.5	7.4
301-500€/year	0.7	4.7	2.2	2.4
501-750€/year	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.9
Over 750€/year	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.5
DK/DA	37.0	2.0	1.9	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

#### **4.3. Reasons for leisure sportspeople practicing physical activity**

As to the reasons for practicing sports of the users of sports facilities installations, we find lower and contrary values to those which define the reasons that characterise leisure and recreational sportspeople, such as: “he/she likes competing” ( $M = 2.86$ ;  $SD = 1.96$ ) and “by profession” ( $M = 2.09$ ;  $SD = 1.69$ ). This is compared to higher values in leisure and recreational sportspeople, and in the following order: “to be fit” ( $M = 6.25$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ); “Health reasons” ( $M = 5.80$ ;  $SD = 1.49$ ); “way to relax” ( $M = 5.26$ ;  $SD = 1.77$ ); “he/she likes doing sport” ( $M = 5.21$ ;  $SD = 1.83$ ); “for personal growth” ( $M = 4.71$ ;  $SD = 1.96$ ); and lastly “as a form of social relation” ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 1.90$ ).

## 5. Discussion

Few comparisons of the profile of the user obtained in this study can be made with other, similar studies due to works with the same end not being easily found in the literature. Nevertheless, though these studies do not base their analysis on the leisure/recreational users of sports practise, we can venture to show coincidences and interpret that the personal and socioeconomic characteristics of these specific users are similar to those of any practitioner, as the works of Baena-Arroyo *et al.* (2020), García-Fernández *et al.* (2019), García-Fernández *et al.* (2017), García-Fernández *et al.* (2016), Valcarce-Torrente *et al.* (2019) and the 2019 Yearbook of Sports Statistics show.

For their part, the results obtained regarding the reasons for practising leisure/recreational sports back those already obtained before by authors such as Valcarce-Torrente *et al.* (2019), although in this latter case the results were obtained from the study of the behaviour of users of low-cost fitness centres. Then, studies such as those performed by the CSD (2015), Elasri *et al.* (2016), García-Fernández *et al.* (2017), Moreno-Murcia *et al.* (2016) and Valcarce-Torrente (2016) conclude that the great majority of the participants do sports focusing on health improvement, improving their physical or mental level, or matters related with personal image, self-esteem and the relations between people. So this reinforces the theory that exotelic reasons predominate in the sports practice oriented towards leisure/recreation.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that the profile of the leisure/recreational sportsperson is that of a person between 21 and 30 years old, single, with university studies and monthly incomes equal to or less than 250 euros. With respect to the behaviour of the users, they are customers of private gyms who have been enrolled previously in other sports centres and who have permanence in their current installation of fewer than 2 years. They attend three times a week and stay between 60 and 90 minutes at the sports centre. The spending on sports services and products is mainly on personal trainers, sportswear, sports shoes and sports nutrition.

Finally, the reasons why they do sport can be concluded to be exotelic; that is to say, it is done to attain another goal and not as an end in itself (to be fit, Health reasons and a way of relaxing).

## 7. Research limitations

The present work presents limitations, which are necessary to collect so that they can serve as a reference for these same researchers or others that may be of interest to this line. Fundamentally, we find methodological limitations. On the one hand, as it has been advanced in the discussion section, it is difficult to compare with respect to user profiles because there are no coincidences in the scientific literature in relation to the variables analyzed. On the other

hand, the sample was not distinguished or segmented based on the sports center model beyond the type of management. We understand that the user profile will depend on the model of the center and may also affect the reasons for practice.

## 8. Future lines of research and implications for management

Based on the aforementioned limitations, we propose the following lines of work. First of all, increase and segment the sample taking into account the different business models in which sports centers are concerned. On the other hand, perform correlation analysis between the different user profiles or specific characteristics of these with the reasons for practice, as well as being able to study whether sports centers know and adapt to these concerns of their clients.

Finally, and in relation to the implications for management, it can be stated that the results obtained can serve managers to guide their strategies aimed at satisfying the needs of these users. Knowing not only the profile of their clients but the motivations that motivate them to go to the center and practice sports can help them make decisions about the services to offer.

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