

The Emergence of Professional Skills Development in the Curricula of Recreational Specialist Training in Hungary

KATALIN KÓS – JUDIT HERPAINÉ LAKÓ – ISTVÁN ÁGOSTON SIMON

Abstract

The definition of the recreation profession is not clear-cut, as it encompasses various roles, such as leisure organizer, health promoter, or animator. The profession is continuously evolving, especially in the field of education, where training has undergone significant changes over the years. From the introduction of recreational courses to the establishment of an independent undergraduate program and the emergence of the “Sport and Recreation Management” program, the training has become increasingly professionalized. The latest curricula, available since 2020 under the name Recreation and Lifestyle, align with new trends. The research aims to examine the content of recreation training programs at Hungarian universities. The hypotheses suggest that the curricula place a strong emphasis on teaching sports and recreational knowledge, support the diversity of the profession through specialization opportunities, and plan practical training for a minimum of two semesters. Based on document analysis, a balance between theoretical studies and applying the knowledge in practice can be observed in the universities’ programs. Promoting sports and a healthy lifestyle plays a central role in all institutions, while each and every university offers different specializations. This study highlights that training programs adapt to societal needs while providing students with opportunities to pursue unique studies tailored to their career goals.

Keywords: Recreation Management and Health Promotion BSc; Model curriculum; Training contents

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Introduction

International and Domestic Focuses in Leisure Education

It is indisputable that leisure plays a distinguished role in the modern university experience, providing prime settings for personal development, self-expression, and experimentation (Lehto et al., 2014; Denovan & Macaskill 2017, cited in Elkington & Carnicelli 2023). As early as 1980, Brightbill and Mobley recognized the significance of this and advocated for integrating a holistic approach to leisure within university campuses. Their vision, encompassing nine fundamental principles, em-

phasized the necessity of formulating a comprehensive leisure concept capable of capturing and interpreting the various forms of leisure activities within the university educational framework. By doing so, leisure can assume a more organic role in universities' societal mission as educational institutions, fostering community development (Mobley 1980, cited in Elkington & Carnicelli 2023).

It was only after more than 10 years that Brighthill and Mobley's concept could trigger the change they predicted with the establishment of the International Charter, adopted by the World Leisure and Recreation Association (WLRA) in 1993, laying down the principles for leisure education and training. These include an understanding of the role of leisure in people's lives, as well as monitoring social, societal, technological and communication trends. At the same time, the Charter stresses the importance of integrating leisure education in different settings, such as schools and cultural organisations. Providing a theoretical basis and applying the right elements in the creation of the programme is also of crucial importance. It also stresses the need to take into account national and racial differences and to build and apply a comprehensive knowledge base in the fields of leisure, sport, culture, media and tourism (WLRA Charter, 1993). The education of professionals has contributed to the promotion of quality leisure time by introducing a specialisation in recreation. The principles of education of professionals summarised in the Charter are well aligned with the objectives of Hungarian recreation education, which are detailed in the Training and Output Requirements set out in the framework of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB). As summarized by Lacza (2014), the education of recreation professionals aims to contribute to the development and promotion of a healthy lifestyle, mental health and sports culture.

From the experience so far, it can be concluded that, in the wider context of modern life, part of leisure education provides an opportunity to prepare certain individuals for professional roles that serve to enhance the recreational opportunities of others. However, according to Elkington and Carnicelli (2023), the role of leisure education is more important in supporting people to develop their values, interests and skills, and in creating an environment that enables them to spend their leisure time in a deeply satisfying way, with or without the use of organised resources of society. In their view, the future of leisure education rests on three mass bases: university students, students with disabilities and educators. In terms of the aims and impact of leisure education programmes, they identify a complex set of skills development leading to improved quality of life, self-fulfilment and serving the community. On the other hand, they emphasise social responsibility, in which universities have an active role to play by providing leisure education. These focus points also overlap in several cases with the cornerstones identified in the Education and Training and Output Requirements for Recreation Education. It is also essential that the bachelor's study programme aims to train recreation and lifestyle professionals who can play an organisational, educational and advisory role in the field of sport, recreation and healthy lifestyles, as well as in business, sports organisations, health, social, educational and training institutions and NGOs. With the knowledge and skills acquired during the programme, recreation professionals will be able to organise, lead and manage a variety of leisure and health activities,

sports events, active touristic programmes, camps, tours and other programmes, thus contributing to improving the quality of life of the population. Furthermore, they know and apply the complex effects of physical activity and sports on the promotion of health and a healthy lifestyle culture, contributing to the development of a culture of sport, recreation and mental health (EMMI Decree No 18/2016 (VIII.5.)). In the light of these findings, it was concluded that there is a shared view that the importance of leisure education goes beyond universities and has an impact on society as a whole. Universities should therefore provide comprehensive programmes that promote the improvement of quality of life, social responsibility, and the education of recreation professionals. This approach, which is also emphasised by Elkington and Carnicelli (2023), provides relevant guidance for Hungarian recreation education, with a particular focus on the needs of students, people with disabilities and lecturers. A comprehensive review of university programmes in recreation education is therefore essential for the further development of recreation education in Hungary, as well as being an integral part of the university experience, supporting the personal development, well-being and social engagement of students and their lecturers. However, an evaluation of the change will be based on a professional overview of the education.

Milestones in Tertiary Recreation Education in Hungary – A Historical Overview

The significance of recreation education first emerged in the 1970s in Canada and Australia. The history of recreation education in Hungary has developed in parallel with international trends. However, recreation education had already begun in Germany in the 1920s, while it became widespread in France and the United States from the 1950s onward. In the USA, recreation education started in the 1930s and has been evolving ever since, integrating elements of health, fitness and recreational sports (Lacza 2014). The current milestones of recreation education in Hungary are related to the development of the subject, later as a pair of courses and later as a separate course (Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021).

In the 1970s, research on leisure and recreation began at the Hungarian College of Physical Education (TF) (now the Hungarian University of Sports Science (TF)), in the direction of health education and sport. In the 1980s, the literature on recreation was mainly related to the physical (movement) domains, but there were also publications in the fields of mental recreation, quality of life and sociology. This provided an ideal basis for the College of Physical Education to introduce the subject 'Recreation – leisure sports' (Dobozy-Jakabházy 1992 cited in Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021) into its curriculum in the 1979/1980 academic year, and in 1981 it was taught as a temporary programme in a course entitled 'Recreation' (Kaszás, 1989 cited in Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021).

Already at that time, the question arose which of the broadly understood areas of recreation should be emphasized in education in Hungary: socio-cultural

recreation, tourism recreation, sports recreation, etc. As a result of professional discussions, the focus was finally on sports recreation (Kovács 2015 cited in Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021). From 1984, the subject of sports recreation was integrated into the physical education teacher training programme, first at the College of Physical Education, then at the Ho Chi Minh Teacher Training College (now Eszterházy Károly Catholic University) (Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021). In 1991, the Faculty of Teacher Education of Eötvös Lóránd University (now the Faculty of Education and Psychology of ELTE) started the Bachelor programme of Recreation, which was a full-time, 8-semester course without qualification requirements, which could be combined with a degree in physical education only (Kiss 2001 cited in Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021). In 1992, the Juhász Gyula Teacher Training College of Szeged (today: Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education at University of Szeged), in 2001 the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport of Semmelweis University (today's Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Sciences) also started the course (MAB 2001 cited in Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021), and in 2003 the Eszterházy Károly College (today's Eszterházy Károly Catholic University) also added the course like the larger universities.

By 2005, recreation training had expanded to multiple academic pathways, including college-level recreation training, university-level physical education teacher training, postgraduate programs, and recreation-sports management dual degrees (Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021).

Following the 2000s, Hungary's recreation education system underwent significant transformations, partly due to international trends. Integration processes within the European Union led to structural changes in recreation training (Lacza 2014). With the introduction of the multi-cycle linear higher education structure, three government decrees (252/2004 (VIII. 30.); 381/2004 (XII. 28.); 289/2005 (XII. 22.)) and one OM decree (15/2006 (IV. 3.)) paved the way for the creation of the independent bachelor's degree programme in the period 2004-2006. It is interesting to note that the first two government decrees referred to this independent BSc program as 'Recreation, Lifestyle, and Health Promotion,' but later decrees and the Training and Output Requirements (KKK) formalized it as 'Recreation Organization and Health Promotion' with two specializations: recreation organization and health promotion.

Six institutions received accreditation to launch the program: the Faculty of Education at University of Szeged (health promotion specialization), Semmelweis University's Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Science (both specializations), University of Pécs's Faculty of Health Sciences (both specializations), Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Education and Psychology (recreation organization specialization), Berzsenyi Dániel College (both specializations), and the Apáczai Csere János Faculty of the University of West Hungary (both specializations) (Gósi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021).

A significant change occurred with Government Decree 139/2015. (VI. 9.), which introduced a new undergraduate program, 'Sports and Recreation Organization,' starting in the 2017/18 academic year, with two specializations: sports organization and recreation organization & health promotion. This marked the sec-

ond instance where recreation education lost its autonomy by being merged with sports organization. According to Gösi, Bárdos, and Magyar (2021), the first integration had already taken place in the past with sports recreation and health education teacher training. The Training and Output Requirements for the new program were outlined in Annex 3 of Ministry Decree 18/2016. (VIII. 5.).

The positioning of recreation education continued with the 2013 'Perspectives in Recreation – Recreation Consensus Conference,' organized by the Recreation Committee of the Hungarian Society for Sport Science and the Institute of Health Development and Sport Science at ELTE. The primary consensus was the facilitation of the school-to-work transition, which, according to Magyar (2018), Bárdos envisioned through the specialization of educational content. It was proposed that training institutions should specialize the training output of recreation professionals through their curricula, thereby narrowing, deepening, and clarifying professional competencies, boundaries, and career opportunities for both employers and graduates. Regional trends played a crucial role in shaping these curriculum reforms. Additionally, the Recreation Movement Program Planner, once an adult education vocational training option, was identified as a foundation for specialization (Magyar 2018).

Within the Recreation Organization specialization of the Sports and Recreation Organization program, the Training and Output Requirements (KKK) allowed universities to establish optional 30-40 credit specializations. For instance, at ELTE's Budapest campus, specializations included Hotel and Event Animator (based on adaptations of the Recreation Movement Program Leader, Animator, and Aqua Trainer vocational training) and Fitness-Wellness Expert (adapted from Fitness Instructor and Sports Coach-Fitness-Wellness Assistant training). Meanwhile, the institution in Szombathely introduced Leisure Sports Expert and Health Promotion specializations (adapted from the former Health Promotion specialization) to enhance the school-to-work transition. These curricular reforms were accompanied by a re-evaluation of professional internships.

To assess the effectiveness of these concepts, multiple universities launched independent research initiatives. In 2020, ELTE began tracking the career paths of graduates, providing feedback on how well recreation education met labour market demands (Gösi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021). That same year, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University initiated doctoral research on this topic, and in 2023, University of Szeged launched student research projects (TDK and ÚNKP), highlighting the ongoing relevance of this issue. However, in 2020, another educational reform was introduced with Government Decree 393/2020. (VIII. 12.), which modified Decree 139/2015. (VI. 9.), setting the stage for the latest generation of recreation education.

Since 2020, recreation education has regained its independence under the new program 'Recreation and Lifestyle'. This change provided universities with greater flexibility to introduce updated content and develop entirely new specializations aligned with the KKK's strategic objectives.

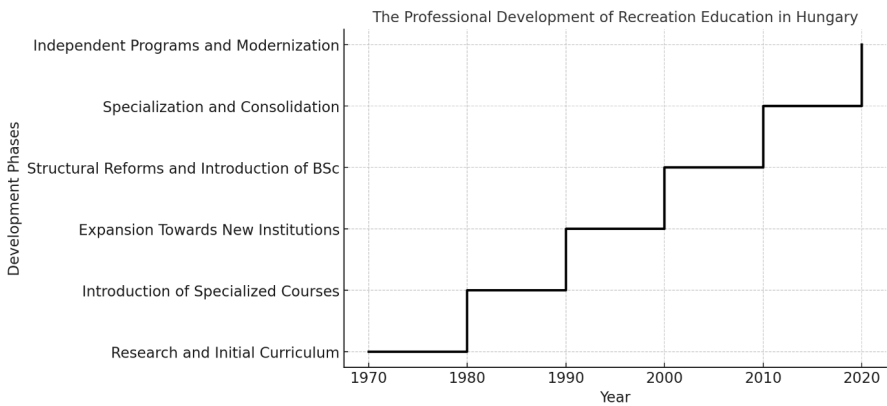


Fig. 1 The Professional Development of Recreation Education in Hungary, source: Own compilation

This development provided another opportunity to specialize the training program and support the school-to-work transition. However, the question remained as to how universities would shape their curricula for the latest program, considering the vast field of recreation science, emerging trends, and the specific attributes of each institution.

Reforms in Hungarian Recreation Education in Light of Training Objectives and Output Requirements

Understanding the role of leisure education is fundamental to human development (Elkington & Carnicelli 2023). According to Lacza, in Hungary, the economic and social changes that have taken place since the Regime Change have significantly influenced the development of higher education in recreation and the employment opportunities for recreation professionals (Lacza 2014, 2–3).

The establishment and evolution of Hungary’s higher education system for recreation can be attributed to several factors. According to Lacza (2014), one of the primary goals in training recreation professionals is to prepare them to assume various roles in sports, recreation, and healthy lifestyle promotion. This includes roles as organizers, educators, and advisors in sports associations, clubs, healthcare and social institutions, as well as in business and civil organizations. Furthermore, the training aims to equip professionals with the skills needed to organize sports events, active tourism programs, and recreational activities (Lacza 2014). These directions were shaped in response to declining health indicators and increasing physical inactivity, trends revealed by health behaviour and time-use studies that gained prominence from the 2000s onwards. One of the major challenges facing Hungary’s recreation training system is the low level of physical activity among the population. Given the worsening health statistics and rising prevalence of cardio-

vascular diseases, training recreation professionals to promote a health-conscious lifestyle and regular physical activity is of critical importance (Lacza 2014).

Recreational training is based on the fields of sports science, health science, social science and economics, and integrates basic knowledge in the public sciences. The curriculum places particular emphasis on understanding the health benefits of physical activity and sports, as well as the conditions for organizing and implementing indoor and outdoor recreational activities. Additionally, the training of recreation professionals incorporates the development of pedagogical, psychological, and communication skills (Lacza 2014). According to Lacza (2014), from 2006 to 2014, recreation education followed two primary directions: leisure activity education and the training of recreation professionals. The former taught students about how people can spend their leisure time productively, while the latter prepared students to manage and organise leisure programs.

However, in the past decade, the recreation program has not met its initial expectations and has not significantly improved Hungary's lifestyle-related health indicators. This has prompted further educational reforms, partially influenced by international trends. These "recreation education reforms" placed greater emphasis on therapeutic recreation while maintaining the traditional focus on sports and leisure organization.

The increasing popularity of therapeutic recreation in Hungarian recreation studies was first illustrated by Bánhidi (2016) in his research, drawing from Lin et al. (2003) and Vernon (2010). The core pillars of therapeutic recreation programs highlight their growing significance within Hungarian education and training reforms. Broadly speaking, therapeutic recreation serves as a treatment method aimed at addressing human-originated problems; its goals closely align with general recreation objectives but involve specialized intervention techniques. These methods appear in various areas of recreation, such as leisure education, leisure skill building, community reintegration programs, and adapted physical education and fitness (Lin et al. 2003, cited in Bánhidi 2016).

In this research context, leisure education emerges as a crucial pillar within therapeutic recreation. A recreation professional may deliver such education through group or individual activities, introducing participants to relevant legislation and treatment options for individuals facing life challenges. Recreation professionals help participants develop problem-solving skills, manage time and energy effectively, and strengthen coping strategies. Additionally, they enhance their knowledge of addiction prevention and recovery methods (Vernon 2010 cited in Bánhidi 2016). Regarding leisure education, Lacza (2014) notes two primary objectives: the first is providing information and guidance to educate individuals on effective leisure use, including participant engagement and leadership. The second is professional training, preparing specialists to lead and manage leisure services. Leisure education thus encompasses both general education initiatives and advanced professional training. Recreation professionals play a crucial role in guiding individuals toward meaningful leisure pursuits, although factors such as formal education, media, and environmental influences also shape leisure behaviours (Lacza 2014).

Bánhidi (2016) emphasizes that an ideal approach involves working within a therapeutic team, ensuring that individuals or groups do not participate in isolation but engage in a holistic process that fosters their physical, mental, and social well-being. The observations of Lin et al. (2003), Vernon (2010), Lacza (2014), and Bánhidi (2016) continue to align with the philosophies of Brightbill and Mobley (1980) and the fundamental principles of the WLRA Charter (1993). These clearly show the inseparability of recent recreation trends and the professional principles of the traditional recreation professional.

It is worth noting that the therapeutic recreation trend has also emerged within the “traditional” pillar of education reforms, as explored extensively in Fritz’s (2019) work. In international literature, the term “Adventure Therapy” is commonly used, alongside “Adventure-Based Therapy,” which has given rise to titles such as “adventure therapist” and “therapeutic adventure practitioner” (Fritz 2019). However, Fritz (2019) points out that these terms are sometimes used interchangeably in different linguistic contexts. Notably, this branch of recreation and its novel forms have yet to make a significant impact on Hungarian recreation education. Although Hungarian-language research on the topic exists, its incorporation into training programs remains an open opportunity.

The observations of Gösi, Bárdos, and Magyar (2021) should also be considered, as international experiences suggest that alternative training directions could have been outlined for Hungarian higher education. A notable example is University of Waterloo in Canada, which played a pioneering role in launching undergraduate recreation programs under the name “Recreation and Leisure Studies”. The institution also introduced the first MA and PhD programs in this field and, as early as 1972, offered four primary specializations: leisure studies, therapeutic recreation, recreation management/administration, and outdoor recreation and education. In 1985, the program further expanded by adding a “Tourism and Recreation” specialization (University of Waterloo, n.d. cited in Gösi – Bárdos – Magyar 2021).

Significant changes were observed between 2000 and 2010 across more than 1,000 academic institutions in Europe, all aligned with the principles of the WLRA Charter (1993, cited in Lacza 2014). However, despite four decades of progress, leisure as a research topic, educational subject, or service field has yet to be fully integrated into a cohesive framework that aids in understanding its complex relationship with modern universities (Elkington & Carnicelli 2023). Furthermore, while leisure education and related programs are not new areas of study, numerous investigations have explored their implementation in various global regions and settings (Sivan 1997; Wu & Hsieh 2006; Shannon, 2012; Yankholmes & Lin 2012; Jordan et al. 2018). The challenge lies in the vast literature available on the topic, most of which focuses on highly specific contexts (Elkington & Carnicelli 2023).

This idea is reinforced by the fact that there is no clear definition of the recreation profession. Various roles such as leisure organiser, programme manager, health promoter, sports organiser, coach or animator can be included. The definition of the term is broad but not always precise. This can be explained by the fact that the profession is constantly evolving, especially in the field of education (Gösi – Bárdos – Magyar 2020). The constant change in the name and content of edu-

cation and training has an impact on society's knowledge of the profession, on the one hand, and on employment, on the other (Kós 2021, 14). The rate of change, quantified over different time periods, is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 2):

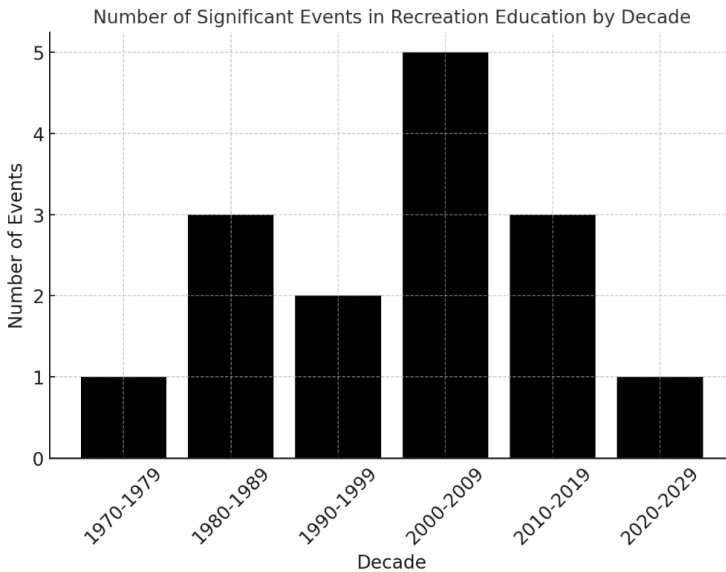


Fig. 2 Number of Events in Recreation Education by Decade,
source: Own compilation

Considering the aforementioned factors, the opportunity arises—after more than 40 years—to conduct a comprehensive review of university programs involved in leisure education, focusing on local specificities and socio-economic impacts. This is particularly relevant in a country where this segment of leisure education has undergone significant differentiation over the past decade.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal and illustrate the diversity of the training content of the Recreation and Lifestyle program, the various approaches to educating recreation professionals, and the specific characteristics of each university offering this program, by proposing seven hypotheses:

H1: It is presumed that the model curricula of Hungarian recreation programs place a strong emphasis on the teaching of sports and recreation knowledge, as reflected in the names of the subjects.

H2: It is also assumed that universities offering the program seek to cover the diversity of the recreation profession's market through a variety of specialization options and unique courses.

H3: It is presumed that professional internships in recreation training span a minimum of two semesters at all universities to facilitate students' transition into the labour market.

H4: It is expected that all universities offer at least three professional camps for students to enhance practical training.

H5: It is assumed that the major branches of recreation are represented in the model curricula of all universities.

H6: It is presumed that sports recreation (physical activity-based recreation) still holds a dominant position in university curricula compared to other areas of recreation.

H7: It is expected that certain courses from sports management programs can still be found within university curricula.

Methodology

This study, utilizing document analysis techniques, employs secondary source analysis, including resolutions of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB), educational regulations, admission guides, and the 2021 model curricula of Hungarian Recreation and Lifestyle programs.

The sample consists of the model curricula of Hungarian higher education institutions offering BSc programs in recreation ($n = 9$), whose geographical distribution is illustrated in the following map:



Fig. 3 Map of Universities Offering Recreation and Lifestyle Education,
source: Own compilation

These universities include University of Debrecen (DE, Debrecen), Eszterházy Károly Catholic University (EKCU, Eger), Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE, Budapest and Szombathely), the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport

Science (MTSE, Budapest), University of Pécs (PTE, Pécs), University of Sopron (SOE, Sopron), University of Szeged (SZTE, Szeged), and Széchenyi István University (SZE, Győr). Notably, ELTE is represented in the sample with two model curricula, as its Budapest and Szombathely campuses follow distinct training profiles in recreation education.

The document analysis was conducted using the following keywords: “recreation,” “sport,” “animation,” “event planning/management,” “adaptive recreation,” “water-based,” “tourism,” “extreme sports,” “adventure sports,” “fun sports,” “performance-oriented recreation,” “intellectual recreation,” “games,” “relaxation techniques,” “music/dance,” “marketing,” “management,” “entrepreneurship,” “specialized language,” “facility/venue management,” and “physical education.” Additionally, specializations, internships, camps, and field exercises were examined, along with the occurrence of different recreation trends (outdoor, indoor, health-promoting, and experience-seeking) in the various curricula and their unique characteristics.

Results

The courses included in the model curricula incorporate the terminology of all three primary authors in the field; however, the terminology of Tamás Attila Kovács appears most dominantly, particularly in relation to recreational sports, camping, and tourism activities. The terminologies of Gábor Gáldi and Péter Fritz appear as supplementary elements. Gáldi’s terminology is emphasized in sports recreation concepts, while Fritz’s terminology is prominent in training theory and rehabilitation aspects.

Occurrence of Sport and Recreation Courses

The results indicate significant differences among universities in terms of the number of sport and recreation courses offered, as detailed in the following table:

Tab. 1 Occurrence of Sport and Recreation Courses in Model Curricula,
source: Own compilation

	Sport (count)	Recreation (count)
University of Debrecen (DE)	22	6
<i>Eszterházy Károly Catholic University (EKCU)</i>	19	15
<i>Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)</i>	18	17
<i>Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science (MTSE)</i>	15	11
<i>University of Pécs (PTE)</i>	38	6
<i>University of Sopron (SOE)</i>	18	12
<i>University of Szeged (SZTE)</i>	7	20
<i>Széchenyi István University (SZE)</i>	11	8

A comparison of the number of recreation courses offered by each university shows that University of Szeged provides the highest number of recreation-labeled courses, while University of Debrecen and University of Pécs offer the fewest. In terms of sport courses, University of Pécs offers the most, whereas University of Szeged offers the least.

Comparison of Specializations Among Universities

The comparison of the number of specializations offered at the universities yielded the following results:

Tab. 2 Universities and Their Specializations, source: Own compilation

University	Specializations
	Active Leisure Specialization
	Water Recreation and Animation Specialization
	Hotel and Event Animator Specialization
	Fitness and Wellness Expert Specialization
	Leisure Sports Expert Specialization
	Health Promotion Specialization
	Adaptive Recreation Specialization
	Water Recreation Specialization

Five universities offer model curricula without specialization: University of Debrecen, the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Szeged, Széchenyi István University, and University of Pécs.

Professional Internships and Field Practices

In terms of the number of professional internships, camps, and field practices, it was determined that the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science and University of Szeged offer the most semesters of such training, while University of Debrecen offers the fewest professional internship semesters (only one semester).

Tab. 3 Number of Professional Internships and Field Practices at Universities,
source: Own compilation

	Professional Internship (semesters)	Camp/Field Practice (semesters)
University of Debrecen (DE)	1	3
<i>Eszterházy Károly Catholic University (EKCU)</i>	2	4
<i>Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)</i>	3	3
<i>Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science (MTSE)</i>	4	5
<i>University of Pécs (PTE)</i>	2	3
<i>University of Sopron (SOE)</i>	3	4
<i>University of Szeged (SZTE)</i>	4	3
<i>Széchenyi István University (SZE)</i>	4	5

The Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Szeged, and Széchenyi István University provide four semesters of professional internships, while Eötvös Loránd University and University of Sopron offer three semesters. Eszterházy Károly Catholic University and University of Pécs each include two semesters of professional internships. Regarding camps and field practices, University of Debrecen, University of Szeged, University of Pécs, and ELTE require three thematic training sessions, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University and University of Sopron require four, while the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science includes five mandatory thematic sessions in its curriculum.

Recreation Trends

For the analysis of recreation trends, we adopted the classification by Tamás Attila Kovács. The results are summarized in the following table:

Tab. 4 Distribution of Recreation Trends in Model Curricula, source: Own compilation

	DE	EKCU	ELTE	MTSE	PTE	SOE	SZTE	SZE
<i>Health-Promoting</i>	6	4	8	9	7	10	12	6
<i>Fitness</i>	1	1	4	2	2	2	1	2
<i>Wellness</i>	0	1	7	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Adaptive Recreation</i>	1	1	2	3	0	4	0	1
<i>Relaxation Techniques</i>	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
<i>Music/Dance</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Experience-Seeking</i>	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
<i>Extreme Sports</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

<i>Adventure Sports</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Fun Sports</i>	3	3	1	1	0	3	2	1
<i>Performance-Oriented</i>	6	10	0	5	8	7	3	9
<i>Outdoor</i>	5	12	6	8	3	11	2	7

It is evident that the health-promoting trend plays a crucial role at all universities, indicating that institutions are keeping pace with current developments, as both traditional and therapeutic recreation are represented in Hungarian education. The highest occurrences are at University of Szeged (12 mentions), University of Sopron (10 mentions), and the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science (9 mentions), highlighting the strong emphasis placed on this area.

Within the health-promoting trend, a closer look at fitness and wellness courses reveals that Eötvös Loránd University offers the highest number of fitness-oriented courses, while at other universities, their occurrence is low (1–2 mentions). Similarly, ELTE stands out in wellness courses, offering seven mentions, whereas other universities have significantly fewer. The relative ratio between these two subgroups demonstrates that fitness-related courses appear more frequently in Hungarian recreation education.

Relaxation techniques play a minimal role in university programs, with only a few institutions—including EKKE and ELTE—offering them as courses.

Music and dance-based movement forms are widely popular within recreation studies in Hungary, and their occurrence was examined. Results show an even distribution among universities, with each institution including one course in this category, suggesting that while these activities are present, they are not considered core components of the curriculum.

Outdoor recreation is particularly emphasized in the model curricula of University of Sopron (11 mentions), Eszterházy Károly Catholic University (12 mentions), and University of Szeged (7 mentions).

Looking at the prevalence of the subgroups of the experiential orientation, it is clear that performance-oriented and fun sports education is the most prominent in the recreational education of Hungarian universities. Performance-oriented sports are strongly represented at Eszterházy Károly Catholic University (10 mentions) and Széchenyi István University (8 mentions), indicating a focus on competitive sports, challenge-based activities, and adventure therapy. Fun sports appear moderately in university programs, with Eötvös Loránd University, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, and University of Sopron (each with three mentions) showing a slightly higher emphasis on recreational, entertainment-based sports.

Regarding the other two subcategories of experience-seeking recreation, the table indicates that only one university includes an extreme sports course in its curriculum—University of Szeged. Conversely, University of Sopron and the Hungarian University of Physical Education and Sport Science offer dedicated adventure sports courses for students.

A similar pattern is observed in the occurrence of adaptive recreation course names, as only a few institutions include them in their programs (e.g., SOE with

four mentions). This finding suggests that inclusive and extreme activities hold relatively low priority within Hungarian recreation education.

Distribution of Recreation Fields

For the examination of recreation fields, we adopted the classification by Tamás Attila Kovács. The findings indicate that at all universities, significantly more courses focus on physical activity-based recreation than on intellectual recreation or tourism-related courses. Notably, University of Pécs and University of Szeged do not include any dedicated intellectual recreation courses in their curricula. Other universities also place minimal emphasis on this field, incorporating only one course within their training programs. Similarly, the number of tourism-related courses is low in the model curricula, with University of Pécs standing out by offering four courses in this field. The detailed distribution of recreation fields based on courses included in university curricula is illustrated in **Table 5** below.

Tab. 5 Emphasis on Recreation Fields in University Programs, source: Own compilation

	<i>DE</i>	<i>EKCU</i>	<i>ELTE</i>	<i>MTSE</i>	<i>PTE</i>	<i>SOE</i>	<i>SZTE</i>	<i>SZE</i>
<i>Physical Activity-Based Recreation</i>	22	8	16	15	37	20	7	12
<i>Intellectual Recreation</i>	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
<i>Tourism</i>	1	1	2	2	4	1	3	1

Prevalence of Joint Courses with Sports Management

Based on historical professional developments, a key question arose regarding the extent to which specialized courses from the Sports Management program (beyond the foundational curriculum) are integrated into the new Recreation program. As Table 6 illustrates, Eötvös Loránd University (9 courses) and University of Debrecen (8 courses) prioritize the inclusion of professional knowledge shared with the Sports Management field in their curricula.

Tab. 6 Distribution of Sports Management-Related Courses, source: Own compilation

	<i>DE</i>	<i>EKCU</i>	<i>ELTE</i>	<i>MTSE</i>	<i>PTE</i>	<i>SOE</i>	<i>SZTE</i>	<i>SZE</i>
<i>Event Planning/Management</i>	7	4	2	2	5	3	2	2
<i>„Sports Management*“</i>	8	5	9	5	4	4	1	6

*Includes marketing, management, facility/institution operation, and entrepreneurship.

It is evident that every university incorporates at least one course related to sports management within its training materials. The occurrence of event planning and management courses follows a similar trend, with University of Debrecen (7 cours-

es) and University of Pécs (5 courses) standing out. This suggests that universities aim to provide students with opportunities to pursue further studies in the Master's program in Sports Management.

Offering of Specialized Courses

Finally, an analysis was conducted on the model curricula of universities to determine what unique, institution-specific courses they offer—either as elective or mandatory subjects.

Tab. 7 Unique Course Offerings and Focus Areas in Recreation Programs,
source: Own compilation

	<i>DE</i>	<i>EKCU</i>	<i>ELTE</i>	<i>MTSE</i>	<i>PTE</i>	<i>SOE</i>	<i>SZTE</i>	<i>SZE</i>
<i>Animation</i>	2	3	3	2	1	3	0	1
<i>Specialized Language</i>	2	1	1	2	0	2	1	1
<i>Teaching/Education</i>	0	1	5	3	1	1	0	3

It is clear that animation—one of the most popular career paths in recreation—is prominently featured in nearly all university programs, spanning multiple semesters. In contrast, specialized language courses, which play a crucial role in the international recognition of the degree and the acquisition of professional terminology, are also widely included in most model curricula, typically over one or two semesters.

Changes in the regulations regarding the structure of teacher training and the specialization requirements outlined in Government Decree 283/2012 (X. 4.) and Ministerial Decree 8/2013 EMMI §1 b) have made it possible for recreation professionals to continue their studies in a teacher training Master's program from the 2024 academic year. This necessitated an examination of whether universities place emphasis on preparing students for teacher training within their curricula. It is evident that nearly all universities offer courses related to teaching physical education and sports; however, most of these are available only as elective courses. Several universities recommend the 'Let's Teach for Hungary' programme, while ELTE specifically enriches students' knowledge in rehabilitation teaching with the course "Health Promotion and Adaptive Physical Education."

Interestingly, every university's model curriculum includes courses that facilitate progression to a Master's program. ELTE is the only institution that requires students to take a Recreation Comprehensive Examination, while Széchenyi István University offers a Final Exam Preparation course to help students prepare for their state examination. Conversely, ELTE, MTSE, and PTE include biochemistry and biomechanics courses, potentially providing students with opportunities to continue their studies in Human Kinesiology or Complex Rehabilitation Master's programs. The following figure aims to illustrate the pathways for recreation professionals to pursue further studies within Hungarian Master's programs.



Fig. 4 Word Cloud of Master's Degree Advancement Opportunities,
source: Own compilation

A unique course offering at Széchenyi István University includes “Basic knowledge of national defence” and the “Professional Mentor Consultation I-II” courses. The former is likely provided in cooperation with the local military battalion, while the latter contributes to reducing student dropout rates and addressing initial academic challenges. This is particularly noteworthy given the professional uncertainty and high attrition rates in the field.

Based on these findings, universities place emphasis on different aspects of recreation education, allowing students to specialize in specific areas depending on their chosen institution.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past 30 years, higher education in recreation in Hungary has developed differently from international examples. Initial challenges have now largely been resolved. Training programs have been designed to align with regional trends, and the structure of external internships has also evolved.

Most universities offer a balanced number of theoretical and practical courses. The general trend suggests that both types of courses receive significant attention, ensuring students acquire the necessary theoretical knowledge and practical experience in the field of recreation.

Health-promoting activities and outdoor programs are the most popular among the listed universities, while extreme sports receive less emphasis. This shift in focus suggests a balance between traditional and emerging trends in recreation education. Fun sports and performance-oriented sports are prominent at certain institutions, such as University of Debrecen and University of Sopron. Adaptive recreation and relaxation techniques are less widespread, though some universities, like University of Sopron, place a greater emphasis on them. Relaxation and music-dance activities have minimal presence across all institutions. Some universities, such as ELTE and Szeged, have specifically specialized in areas like wellness and health promotion, reflecting a commitment to trend-following. The

research also suggests that universities may emphasize different activity types, reflecting institutional specialties.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the diversity and specificity of recreation and lifestyle education and professional training at Hungarian universities. Seven hypotheses were formulated within this framework. Based on the findings, some hypotheses were confirmed, while others were partially or entirely refuted:

The study confirmed that Hungarian recreation programs place significant emphasis on the teaching of sports and recreation knowledge. Additionally, the model curricula include various professional internships and camps. Thus, hypotheses concerning the distribution of sports and recreation knowledge, diverse specialization opportunities, field practices, camps, internships, and the presence of different recreation trends were validated.

The dominance of core recreation fields and sports recreation was also confirmed. However, since the proportion and emphasis of these fields varied by university, this hypothesis was only partially supported.

Results indicated that certain courses from the Sports Management program are still present in university curricula. However, their prominence and significance have declined in favour of specialized recreation training elements, meaning this hypothesis was only partially validated.

The study highlighted the differences and similarities in recreation education across the examined universities, contributing to meeting students' unique needs. The findings provide valuable insights into the current state of education and potential directions for future development.

The analysis of similarities and differences between universities reveals that, while the core principles of recreation education remain similar, institutional characteristics, strengths, and specializations significantly influence course content and structure. Some universities differentiate themselves with innovative or unique courses covering novel approaches or less frequently discussed topics. This suggests that students should consider their interests, career goals, and the unique opportunities offered by different universities to find the most suitable training program.

The analysis also indicates that Hungarian universities strive to provide broad and diverse training for students interested in recreation and related fields. These programs enable students to deepen their knowledge, gain practical experience, and foster professional identity formation through curriculum content that supports professional development.

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