

## The Digital Generation's Physical Activities

Cristiana Lucretia Pop

*Department of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest Economic Studies Academy, Romania  
E-mail: crispotir@yahoo.com*

**KEYWORDS** Web Culture. Skateboarding. Biking. Parkour. Winter Olympic Games

**ABSTRACT** This paper is an original approach about the informal physical activities and the preferences of the youngsters. Digital generation is the young generation born after the PC (personal computer) and Internet was largely introduced. From the early years of life they grow up with computer games, having accounts on social online communities and searching for information on Internet. Sports have their own place in this contemporaneous trend and are in tight relationship with web cultural elements, exploring new spaces and possibilities. Rollers, skateboarders, bikers or the ones who use just their own body for creating new, original movements, and tricks are using new patterns of learning, exercising and communicating. Instead of explanations they use the mobile phone to video recorder and watch the drills. The young people communities formed by common interests, sharing experiences and knowledge have a certain social and cultural value. The high speed, the high technology (IT gadgets) and a high level of adrenaline are, in author's opinion, the three main factors that define the spirit of the young generation physical activity.

### INTRODUCTION

Digital generation is the young generation born after the PC and Internet was largely introduced. From the first years of life they grow up with computer games, having accounts on social online communities and searching for information on Internet, the biggest information deposit. This constant exposure to the Internet has shaped how they receive information and how they learn (Oblinger 2004). They use new patterns of learning; communicating and behaving that are more and more related to onscreen activities. Onscreen activities include watching television, surfing online or playing video games, and all are associated with sedentary behaviour.

The authors of a Canadian extensive survey and a meta analysis of the topic conclude that relationships between sedentary behavior and health are unlikely to be explained using single markers of inactivity such as TV viewing or video/computer game use. Nevertheless they agree that "the total amount of time per day engaged in sedentary behavior is inevitably prohibitive of physical activity and the cumulative effect of multiple sedentary behaviors reduces total daily energy expenditure" (Marshall et al. 2004).

In the author's opinion constant playing of some console and computer games has an influence in reducing the inhibition level of children. They are more self confident and eager to experience risky situation, similar with virtual characters. This opinion is supported by a study about potential signals for addictive behavior, which

reveals that inhibitory control deficit (similar to impulsivity) was significantly related to high intercept levels of both video gaming and high calories and low nutrients intake. Boys exhibited higher levels of both video gaming and HCLN intake than girls (Pentz et al. 2011).

This lower level of self protection instinct or maybe a rush for excitement generates a new approach in physical activities, especially in urban locations. Sports have their own place in this contemporaneous trend and are in tight relationship with web cultural elements, exploring new spaces and possibilities. The architectural structures and elements are used by rollers, skateboarders, bikers or the one who use just their own body for creating new, original movements, and tricks.

### METHODS

This research aims to highlight the recent forms of physical activities, developed especially in urban environment and their social and cultural aspects. A historical approach was considered to explain the turn up and evolution of those leisure activities until they gain international recognition and a competition frame.

The bibliographic research was doubled with direct observation in European skate parks and extreme sports facilities. Valuable information was obtained, in the last decade, in direct conversations with different generations of urban sportsmen and amateurs.

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

### Urban Sports

Flat asphalt surfaces were created for more secure and efficient vehicles driving. Therefore, maybe, almost all of the urban sports are related with moving on wheels. It was an impulse for young generation to invent new sports like in-line skating, biking, skateboarding, wall and even building climbing (Pop 2011).

Urban sports have the potential to appeal mainly to teenagers in the 14-18 age group, who often have little interest in more structured team sports activities. They can contribute to skill building, self confidence, social inclusion and healthy, active lifestyles (Davidson et al. 2013).

### Outdoor Physical Activities

The modern style of inline skates were developed as a substitute for ice skates and have two, three, four or five wheels arranged in a single line. For different skating style, the size of the wheels is also different; the smallest correspond for aggressive skating, following artistic inline skating, roller hockey, freestyle slalom, general recreational skating and the biggest wheels for speed skating.

Inline skaters make acrobatic tricks over obstacles; they freeze in difficult positions on edges and then slide again gathering run-up for a new take off and complex spinning in high speed.

More creative options give the skateboarding, because the jumps, twists and the positions of the body and the board may be combined. The skate board is an adaptation of the snow board to a different climate and environment conditions.

Street skating uses plane surfaces, street curves, banisters and other elements of urban furniture, and this is just one of this sport forms. As time the skaters speed need was growing, they began to project and use ramps and other vertical structures.

The next step on this sport evolution was the half pipe – a U shape ramp, in different sizes, which regularly has a middle flat surface. Skateboard competitions are held on this kind of ramp, with the walls 2.5 m height at least and perfect vertical on the upper part.

All this evolution had the purpose to increase the rolling speed, which was used than in

higher jumps. The prolongations of the flying time made possible more various and complicated acrobatic combinations. In just a decade the skateboarding became a very spectacular sport. The rapid development and the success among the young generation brought a real industry around this phenomenon. Not just the sport material industry, but also the non-conventional clothing industry flourishes on the expense of urban events which promote the new sports.

The equipment, in the beginning borrowed some elements from hip-hop clothing, being actually a street wear with oversized articles. The main clothing elements, for men specially, are large trousers, large T-shirts, caps, special designed shoes with good adherence on skateboard or bike pedals. Besides the commodity of this large wear, it offers also the possibility to take under knee or elbow protective pads. In these sports the probability to fall and injure is very high, therefore helmets are required to be worn during competitions.

In time the forms of urban sports (skateboard, bike or roller skates) diversified and subsequently the sport companies kept pace, creating new lines of sportswear, with spaces dedicated for gadgets. What really defines the outfit in this sort of sports is street clothing, even in competitions.

### Parkour (fr)

Parkour is a non-competitive form of physical training to overcome an obstacle course. The practitioners goal is to do it in the most efficiently and rapidly way possible. Parkour is often seen practiced in urban areas because of the many suitable public structures available such as buildings and bridges. The most required skills are acrobatic abilities, climbing, balance or spatial awareness. The origin of parkour is in the classic obstacle course method of military training. It implies speed, movement efficiency, using just the own body and adapting in a creative way the environment. The practitioners of this discipline insist on the non-competitive character of parkour and promote the value of positive collaboration, responsibility, sharing of knowledge, safety of practice, respect for people, places and spaces.

### Biking

Biking differs from cycling and uses a modified cross-country bike to be more efficient on

tricks performed in urban environment. As like skateboard, biking also has different disciplines depending of the obstacles and the surface of performing. This are: a route on street (street), an obstacle course in a skate park, acrobatic tricks on half pipe (vert), tricks on a flat surface (flatland), a route on dirt ramps (dirt jump) and the first form of biking – a race on a rugged terrain (racing).

The street performing means an improvisation where the biker jumps or slides over some obstacles in public places. This version is considered more creative in comparison with a ride on ramps in a skate park, because the unexpected of the streets in a city. The bicycles used for street performing are more robust and heavy than the ones for tricks on ramps because they must absorb the shock of landings. On the ramps or half pipe the landing shock is partially taken over by the descending inclination of this installation.

The skate parks are places used in common by skaters, skateboarders and bikers. This groups change information, experience and take inspiration from the others in inventing and performing new tricks and combinations.

The shape, diversity and the material of ramps have a significant influence on the acrobatic performances. In a ramp construction the most used materials are the wood, concrete and metal. The wooden surfaces are better for complicate tricks but on concrete you can develop a better speed which helps for higher jumps. Talking about costs, the wooden structures are cheaper, handier and lighter but also more exposed to weather beaten (moisture or freezing). The concrete ramps are more lasting and also more expensive, but usually they are on the municipality charge. Thinking just in the benefit of the beginners in this kind of sports, it is less harmful to fall (many times in the beginning) on a wooden structure instead on a concrete one. Another sort of ramp, more strong, abiding and speeding has a metallic frame on which is installed a shape of composite materials.

The vert is the most spectacular competition of urban riders. The name is coming from the side walls of the half pipe, which are vertical. Usually the height of this walls is between 2,5 and 3,5 m but the highest half pipe for competitions was approximately 9m (27 feet).

The bikers gain speed on one of the vertical walls and they take over from the opposite one.

In this short flying time they perform single tricks or a serial of tricks that tempt the gravity. They can perform also slides or grinds on the edge in the upper part of the vert, followed again of a down ride and a new fly over the other edge. This activity implies enough risks; serious injuries are quite frequent even among the advanced competitors, not only among beginners.

All this urban sports: inline skating, skateboarding, BMX freestyle, together with moto X – an extreme sport with motorbikes, or surf and kite-board are reunited in one annual competition of extreme sports. First edition had place in 1995 at Rhode Island, Vermont and had a huge success. The event had 198.000 spectators. Since then the interest was growing every year.

For branding reasons the competition name was changed starting from 1997 in *X Games*. The marketing policy of the producers (ESPN / EXPN) had good results and today they organize as well X Games Asia and Latin America X Games. The events broadcasting are present on entire world TV channels. Soon after, the competitions gain extent and diversity in USA (Gravity Games, Dew Tour Cup); in Europe: Backyard Jam, BMX Master, King of Concrete or in Asia: Circle of Balance (EXPN 2007).

Since 1997, in Aspen, Colorado is taking place a competition of winter extreme sports. Tough they started latter, the evolution of the new sports on snow was faster; freestyle skiing and snowboarding are today in the winter Olympic Games program. Four new events in snowboarding, including men's and women's Slopestyle and Snowboard Parallel Slalom, have been added to the Olympic Games program in Sochi 2014 (<http://www.sochi2014.com/en/schedule-and-results>).

Many winners in Winter X Games competed with success in World Championship and Olympic competition, representing with honor their countries. One good example is David Wise (USA) the 23-year-old world champion and three-time X-Games winner in the event. Wise was a heavy favorite for the competition, which made its Olympic debut in Sochi (Holpuch 2014) and become the first ever gold medalist in the Olympic men's freestyle skiing halfpipe competition.

## CONCLUSION

Urban sports and leisure are parts of city's young generation culture. They are a kind of adaptation to the build environment in which we

are living. First of all inline skates, skateboards and bikes are vehicles and are used for moving in the urban space. At least from this point of view they differ fundamentally from other sports like football, rugby or cricket which suppose the field idea, a natural surface, or an unmodified soil, with a natural texture.

The spectacular character of tricks and series of acrobatic elements and the speed of performing requires an impressive volume of practice. The training develops all types of physical skills and especially balance, spatial awareness in unusual conditions, reaction and execution speed.

It is not an easy task to find information about urban sports in traditional supports, like books, with technical description or traditional teaching methods. Nevertheless the methodical material on hard support are largely illustrated, the visual information being essential for understanding the complicated motions, the interaction with the complement (skateboard, bike, rollerblade) and the surface (flat, ramp, vert, banister, stairs, slide, etc.). The first option for digital generation is the internet; on dedicated websites you can find videos about tricks and sometime explanations about how you can practice them. The digital informal learning is internal motivated and unconstrained by time, place or formal learning structures.

Actually, in skate parks, the beginners practice with advanced people and they learn together and one from another. Instead of explanations they use the mobile phone to video recorder the drills and the internet connection for instant sharing the hits. The young people communities formed by common interests, sharing experiences and knowledge in a genuine active learning process, have a certain social and cultural value.

The high speed, the use of IT applications and most of the time a high level of adrenaline are, in author's judgment, the three main factors that define the spirit of this new generation physical activities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The interest and the enthusiasm this physical activity brings in children and teenager's lives de-

serve more attention from PE teachers and authorities. More skate parks could bring more children, teenagers and young people outdoors to practice and improve their physical skills and fitness.

Biking, rolling and skateboarding are means to encourage physical activities outdoors, during which air, sunlight and (sometimes) water can act to harden and strengthen the body's health and vigour.

A program for inline skating or skateboarding in the schoolyard could be an interesting change in physical education classes, at least for a few weeks. A climbing wall, with a medium difficulty, could be installed for teenagers regarding to adapt the activity to their preferences. The main difficulty in this project consists in providing the safety equipment for all.

### REFERENCES

- Davidson N, Dower R, Patherson T, McPhee A 2013. An Introducing to Glasgow Urban Sports. From <[http://www.bungoblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Introducing\\_GUS](http://www.bungoblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Introducing_GUS)> (Retrieved on 30 March 2014).
- EXPAN 2007. From <[skateboard.about.com/cs/events/a/XGamesHistory](http://skateboard.about.com/cs/events/a/XGamesHistory)> (Retrieved on 21 July 2013).
- Fry, Kathie, Editor, Inline Skating and Quad Roller Skating, 2013. From <[www.skatelog.com/x-games](http://www.skatelog.com/x-games)> (Retrieved on 21 May 2013).
- Holpuch A 2014. American David Wise Wins Gold Medal in First Olympic Freestyle Skiing Event. From <[theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)> (Retrieved on 18 February 2014).
- Marshall SJ, Biddle H, Gorely TN, Cameron N, Murdey I 2004. Relationships between media use, body fatness and physical activity in children and youth: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Obesity*, 28: 1238–1246.
- Obliger D 2004. The Next Generation of Educational Engagement. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. From <[www-jime.open.ac.uk/2004/8](http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/2004/8)> (Retrieved on 21 July 2013).
- Official Website of the Olympic Movement, 2014. From <<http://www.sochi2014.com/en/schedule-and-results>> (Retrieved on 29 March 2014).
- Pentz MA, Spruijt-Metz D, Chou CP, Riggs NR 2011. High calorie, low nutrient food/beverage intake and video gaming in children as potential signals for addictive behavior. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 8(12): 4406–4424.
- Pop C 2011. Sport and leisure in urban space. *Contemporary Trends, Problems and Innovations of the Physical Education and Sports in the University*, 1: Ed. Discobolul, pp. 291-297.
- X Games, 2013. From <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X-Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X-Games)> (Retrieved on 15 August 2013).