

DEVELOPMENT OR DECLINE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE? PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF THE ALPHA GENERATION FROM THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE

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Summary

There is evidence of a decline in interest in physical activity among the Alpha Generation. It is therefore evident that physical culture must adapt to the specific characteristics of the youngest generation if it is to survive. In light of the aforementioned considerations, the objective of this humanist article is to ascertain whether physical culture can evolve in a manner that will ensure its continued existence or whether it is on a trajectory towards decline. This qualitative research presents a summary of the observations made and allows us to formulate a general thesis. The characteristics of the Alpha Generation are presented herewith, with an emphasis on the advantages and disadvantages inherent in their enhanced digital proficiency and the concomitant challenges to social cohesion. It was indicated that their expectations of physical activities were focused on e-sports and smart technology. It can be considered that the next phase of physical culture development will take place through the introduction of e-sports and smart technology into the physical activities undertaken by the Alpha Generation. At the same time, this development must be sustainable, in that it must still recognize the traditional values of physical culture. This will ensure that the generation in question functions well both with and without technology.

Keywords: pedagogy of physical culture, psychology of physical activity, sociology of physical culture, generation theory, qualitative research

Introduction

A multitude of theories have been put forth to explain the functioning of generations [1]. The most widely accepted theory in this regard is that of generations as proposed by William Strauss and Neil Howe [2]. The theory is concerned with the characteristics of generations in American society, which are assumed to be shaped by the conditions of society during the individuals' childhood and youth. These characteristics exert an influence on the functioning of existing generations and their differences in terms of their approach to work [3].

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The theory proposed by William Strauss and Neil Howe has been demonstrated to have universal applicability, as evidenced by its coverage in other countries, albeit only in the context of contemporary generations [4]. Those born after the Second World War exhibit the same dominant characteristics, and the boundaries between generations are shaped by technological advancement. Consequently, the emergence of intergenerational boundaries is estimated to occur within a range of plus or minus five years [5], contingent on the pace of technological development in a given country. In the Polish context, five post-war generations can be identified [6].

The cohort of individuals who are currently the oldest living generation is commonly referred to as the 'Baby Boomers' or BB. These are individuals who were born in Poland during the substantial increase in births that occurred between 1946 and 1964 [7]. The term 'success' is primarily associated with systematic work, during which they independently attained their elevated positions. They espouse traditional values and adhere to a conservative family structure [8]. They are characterized by their persistence in work and commitment to their resolutions [9]. A sense of stability is a key aspect of their identity. They demonstrate loyalty and respect for authority figures [10]. However, they experience a sense of fulfilment when they are able to contribute to a meaningful cause, which often leads them to pursue leisure activities during their retirement years [11]. The subsequent cohort, designated as the 'Great Unknown' (X), comprises individuals born in Poland during a period of socio-political uncertainty between 1965 and 1980 [12]. At that time, Poland functioned as the People's Republic of Poland, and the prevailing political and economic system was communism, which was opposed by society at large [13]. These individuals value quality and leisure time but do not differentiate between social classes based on wealth [14]. They place great importance on peace and the preservation of traditions [15]. They are socially sensitive and work efficiently, with a strong sense of loyalty to one job if they receive a fair wage [16].

The subsequent cohort of the population is designated as the Millennial Generation (Y). These individuals were born between 1981 and 1995, representing the final generation to be born in the 20th century [17]. They are individuals who integrate leisure activities with professional pursuits and personal growth [18]. They are adept at multitasking and do not identify with a single workplace [19]. They prefer a relaxed work environment and are motivated by praise [20]. This manifests as a drive for self-realization through the pursuit of high-quality activities, imbued with a strong sense of motivation [21]. The subsequent generation is colloquially referred to as 'Snowflakes' (Z). These individuals were born between 1996 and 2010, which corresponds to the turn of the century [22]. The term 'Snowflakes' is used to describe this generation because they have had a largely stress-free upbringing [23]. They demonstrate an effective integration of online and offline functioning [24]. The Zs are adept at managing multiple tasks and are inclined to work remotely, which affords them the opportunity to travel frequently [25]. They only engage in work activities when they perceive the potential for personal growth [26] and exhibit pessimistic and critical attitudes yet demonstrate creativity and independence in their work. The theory of the fifth youngest generation, designated Alpha, was developed by Mark McCrindle [27]. The Alpha Generation comprises individuals born between 2011 and 2025, who are believed to have been exposed to smart technology from an early age [28]. The Alpha Generation is exerting a significant influence on social media and pop culture [29]. They are the most technologically adept generation to date and are unable to function without the Internet [30]. They prefer to learn and play on apps, which presents a challenge for them in functioning offline [31]. This is reflected in their lack of initiative in organizing their leisure time, their difficulty in forming relationships and in maintaining their attention span [32].

The aforementioned generations operate concurrently, employing contemporary technology to varying extents. However, it is the Alpha Generation that is most dependent on technology, due to their prolonged and pervasive exposure to digital devices from the earliest stages of their lives [33]. This is reflected in their constant understanding of reality solely from the perspective of technology use, which is less evident in the other generations: BB, X, Y, Z. In the field of culture in the broadest sense, this problem is particularly evident in the domain of physical culture, which aims to maintain health through the shaping of physical fitness.

Aim of the work

The objective of this humanist article is therefore to ascertain the trajectory of physical culture in the 21st century. Given that the entirety of physical culture's activities and attitudes must adapt to the characteristics of the Alpha Generation in order to survive, it is reasonable to inquire whether this represents an opportunity for the development or the decline of physical culture.

Methods

The methods of analysis of source materials and critical analysis of the source text were used [34]. The method of source analysis is widely used in all scientific disciplines. It allows assumptions to be verified on the basis of the results of published work and the authors' own experience. With this method, knowledge can be verified qualitatively [35]. The method of source material analysis does not define numerical indicators to characterize the phenomenon or object of study but requires a thorough analysis of the available materials through a deep understanding of reality [36]. This is followed by a verification of the data through a critical analysis of the source text. In this way, it is possible to demonstrate the originality of the problem situation chosen for study and the desirability of its analysis. By verifying what already exists in literature, it is possible to demonstrate the relationships, differences and dependencies of the problem under study with the current state of knowledge [37]. Particular reference was made to the latest research reports on the Alpha Generation in open access, with a particular focus on the last two years.

Literature review results

Physical culture according to the Alpha Generation

Physical culture is a component of culture in general. The interdisciplinary approach is applicable to physical activity in its broadest sense, encompassing the areas of physical education, rehabilitation, recreation, sport (amateur, competitive, professional) and tourism [38]. It is crucial to consider the impact of physical culture on the physical and mental health of society, achieved through systematic exercise [39]. This encompasses the formation of correct bodily habits and attitudes, personality, self-discipline and functioning in society [40]. However, when effective physical culture methodologies are confronted with the specifics of the Alpha Generation, the results are increasingly poor. In Poland, there is a noticeable decline in interest in physical activity among the youngest generation [41].

The Alpha Generation is, on the one hand, digitally literate, but on the other hand, demonstrates difficulties in functioning in everyday social situations [33]. The initial response in this group is typically driven by online sources that are perceived as trendy, with the information found there being accepted as inherent to social relations. Such reactions encompass technologies that are progressively sophisticated and accessible exclusively via smart technology [42]. It is also noteworthy that the Alpha Generation tends

to avoid situations that induce boredom and prefers for their parents to initiate activities on their behalf. They are willing to engage in a range of physical activities that align with online trends and utilize smart technology. In contrast to older generations, the Alpha Generation is primarily motivated and encouraged to engage in regular physical activities by parents, teachers, coaches and educators [43]. The youngest generation is inclined to closely monitor the effects of their activities, as observed in their engagement with digital games. Consequently, they are drawn to e-sports and popcorn gaming [44]. Additionally, they demonstrate interest in traditional forms of exercise when integrated with smartwatches, smartphones or interactive whiteboards.

It is of paramount importance to emphasize that the future of civilization is inextricably linked to the actions and decisions of successive generations [5]. The significance of a specific generation increases gradually, initially through the dissemination of specific ideas and trends, which eventually become the norms of society. This illustrates the gradual association of individuals striving to actualize the proclaimed ideas. In this way, generations forge notions about their aspirations and goals, which may not always be justified but are always defined. In this mechanism, which has been in place for years, it is noticeable that the Alpha Generation is strengthening. In this way, the older generation is gradually being superseded by the younger generation, who are demolishing or modifying existing social norms [45].

Solution to the problem: development or decline of physical culture?

It would be prudent to consider the most effective means of encouraging the Alpha Generation to engage in physical activity. This may be accomplished by addressing issues that are pertinent to this demographic. In light of the growing significance of e-sports and smart technology among this demographic, it seems reasonable to posit that the next phase of physical culture evolution will entail the incorporation of these elements into existing physical activities. E-sports can be a valuable addition to traditional forms of physical activity or a means of introducing the Alpha Generation to the world of sport. It can be reasonably deduced that the integration of smart technology into educational settings, training programs and tourism and recreation activities can serve to enhance the level of engagement exhibited by young individuals engaged in physical exercise. The utilization of smartwatches has been observed to be particularly effective among the Alpha Generation, as evidenced by their ability to continuously monitor vital signs such as heart rate, calorie expenditure and the number of steps taken. Furthermore, the incorporation of multimedia displays has been demonstrated to be an efficacious strategy among younger age groups, as it motivates engagement in physical activity through the observation of demonstrations of movement tasks performed at a proficient level. The demonstration of exemplary performances by celebrated athletes serves to motivate younger students to engage in a prescribed movement activity under the guidance of an instructor or coach. It is notable that the Alpha Generation is particularly drawn to influencers on social media. Consequently, incorporating instructional videos from a designated YouTube channel into the prescribed movement activities could prove beneficial. In such instances, the role of the supervisor would be to select the most pertinent YouTube channels and then, in a manner analogous to existing physical culture methodology, to oversee the exercise practitioners.

Conversely, the shift of emphasis towards e-sports and the utilization of intelligent technology in physical activities may potentially result in a decline in mindful physical activity. Since time immemorial, those engaged in physical activities have acquired the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies to maintain their own fitness and health. Should digital interactions become the primary determinants of exercise participation, it would signify a transfer of responsibility for physical fitness and health to the domain of

digital entities. This raises the question of the boundaries of such entities. The answer is straightforward: e-sports and smart technology ends where there is no Internet access. Consequently, in contexts where Internet access is unavailable, the Alpha Generation must possess the requisite knowledge, ability and capacity to engage in humanizing exercises based on the accumulated wisdom of older generations.

It was thus concluded that it is beneficial to derive advantages from technological advancement while simultaneously upholding the significance of ancestral achievements. It may therefore be concluded that the prospect of the development, rather than decline, of physical culture for the Alpha Generation is the result of the incorporation of modern technology into the support of physical activity. It is important to emphasize that this integration is not intended to replace traditional forms of activity in all areas of physical culture. Therefore, the development of physical culture through the integration of modern technologies must be sustainable. This is the only way in which it is possible to educate wise and independent generations.

Discussion of the review results

The success of the physical activities undertaken by the Alpha Generation is contingent upon a comprehensive understanding of their expectations. It is of the utmost importance for the older generation, who are by definition nurturers, to be able to exert influence over the younger generation while simultaneously learning from them. This reciprocal relationship will result in a sense of mutual satisfaction and, subsequently, a favorable outcome of the physical activities in question. The combination of technology with a shared experience of intergenerational physical culture values represents a crucial step in addressing the aforementioned issue.

The Alpha Generation is characterized by a distinctive way of being, a specific mode of life, a particular occupational profile, a set of character traits and a level of mental development that sets them apart from preceding generations. The defining characteristics of this generation have resulted in a divergence from the norms of their predecessors in terms of cognitive processes, behavioral patterns and emotional responses [27]. However, as with preceding generations, the Alpha Generation is defined by a time frame of approximately fifteen years [42]. It is estimated that those born between 2026 and 2040 will constitute the Beta generation, which, by definition, will grow up with the development of artificial intelligence [46]. Therefore, the youngest Alpha Generation studied today will be the equivalent of the older generation interacting with the Beta generation in the coming years [47]. The developments made with the Alpha Generation will have a bearing on the future [48]. If the introduction of e-sports and smart technology is only to be a tool to maintain the values of physical culture and pass these on to the next generation, then this is the only sensible solution to the problem addressed.

In consideration of the aforementioned factors, it has been proposed that the issue of generational research from an interdisciplinary perspective remains a pertinent and ongoing concern [49]. The general and specific characteristics of each generation emerge from the unconscious and are possessed by the majority of the representatives of a generation, to a more or less equal degree, manifesting as characteristics common to all [50]. Diversity is transformed into homogeneity. Moreover, the status of the youngest generation is frequently regarded as a license for irresponsibility. Conversely, a contagion of negative attitudes may develop among the youngest generation if the reprehensible behavior observed among other young people is not adequately punished [51]. Furthermore, the desensitization of adults can result in the youngest generation becoming susceptible to a range of negative influences. In the absence of healthy intergenerational relationships, younger individuals will invariably seek authority in forms of communication that are accessible to them, which will often be digital [52].

In conclusion, it is vital to facilitate the effective communication of the experiences of older generations in physical culture to younger generations through the rational use of modern technology. This form of communication between generations can provide an attractive reinforcement of mutual learning, which is essential for the preservation of physical cultural assets. Therefore, it is crucial to involve the Alpha Generation in physical activity by linking intergenerational relationships based on sustainability, where common sense serves as the coordinating value.

Conclusions

The advancement of physical culture through the harmonization of conventional values and contemporary technologies is contingent upon the implementation of sustainable development practices. Conversely, the prioritization of modern technologies over the traditional values of physical culture represents a significant risk factor for the future of this field.

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