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Towards gender equity in urban outdoor sport spaces

An explorative study on women and outdoor sports in five European cities

Vicky Dellas

Agnes Elling



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Executive Summary

Both sports and public spaces are traditionally societal domains, constructed for and dominated by men. Despite large developments having taken place, with women being much more present both in public spaces and mainstream sports in most Western societies, including European countries, gender equality has still not been reached. In nearly all of the member states of the European Union, men are still more likely than women to participate in Sport and Recreational Physical Activities (SRPA), including outdoor sports.

Although there are numerous advocacy and communication initiatives to enhance women's sport participation in European countries, less attention has been paid to better facilitate outdoor SRPA for women in urban environments. The project *Sports for Women in Urban Places* (SW-UP) aims at gathering evidence on why and how to better create and direct women friendly outdoor SRPA spaces in urban environments. The project is a cooperation between several European partners¹, coordinated by ALDA - the European Association for Local Democracy. Conducting a survey amongst the adult population in the participating cities is one of the activities in the project; this activity was coordinated by the Mulier Institute.

Methodology: online survey

The aim of the study was to shed more light on the (outdoor) sport participation of women and their motives, experienced barriers and required conditions for starting/continuing their participating in outdoor SRPA. Data collection took place through the distribution of an online questionnaire in the respective countries and languages amongst adult residents of five South and Eastern European cities². The partners from each city were responsible for recruiting respondents, which took place via social media, through email (for example the internal mail of the partners organisation), club contacts, parish councils, schools and personal contacts.

The questionnaire mainly contained closed items about sociodemographic positions (e.g. gender, age, education), (outdoor) sports participation, motivations for participation in (outdoor) sports and reasons for non-participation, experienced barriers and required conditions for outdoor SRPA participation. Most questions contained a list of items with multiple response options (yes/no or a 5-point Likert scale). Furthermore, the questionnaire contained two open questions asking for suggestions on how to improve women's participation in outdoor SRPA.

The total number of valid responses was 1,035, with a majority of women respondents (84%), that were relatively well divided amongst the participating cities, except for Sofia having less than 100 female respondents. Overall most women respondents were middle-aged (53%), whilst older women were underrepresented; in Ramnicu Sarat the majority were young women (65%).

¹ Istituto per la ricerca sociale, Milano Italy. Câmara Municipal de Guimarães, Guimarães, Portugal. Tempo livre, Guimarães, Portugal. Comune di Corbetta, Corbetta, Italy. Association La Margherita blu, Corbetta, Italy. Ajuntament de Granollers, Granollers, Spain. Mulier Instituut, Utrecht, Netherlands. Uat Ramnicu Sarat, Ramnicu Sarat, Romania. European Capital for Sport, Sofia, Bulgaria.

² Corbetta (Italy), Granollers (Spain), Guimarães (Portugal), Ramnicu Sarat (Romania) and Sofia (Bulgaria). The questionnaire for Granollers was translated into both Spanish and Catalan.

Furthermore, nearly all respondents - both men and women - were non-migrants and the majority were higher educated (college/university), and therefore not representative of the (female) population in the respective cities.

The conducted analyses were mainly bivariate and differences relating to city or age were controlled for possible interacting effects. On a selection of prioritized required conditions, linear regression analyses were conducted. The textual data of the open questions were analysed by conducting a thematic content analysis.

Results

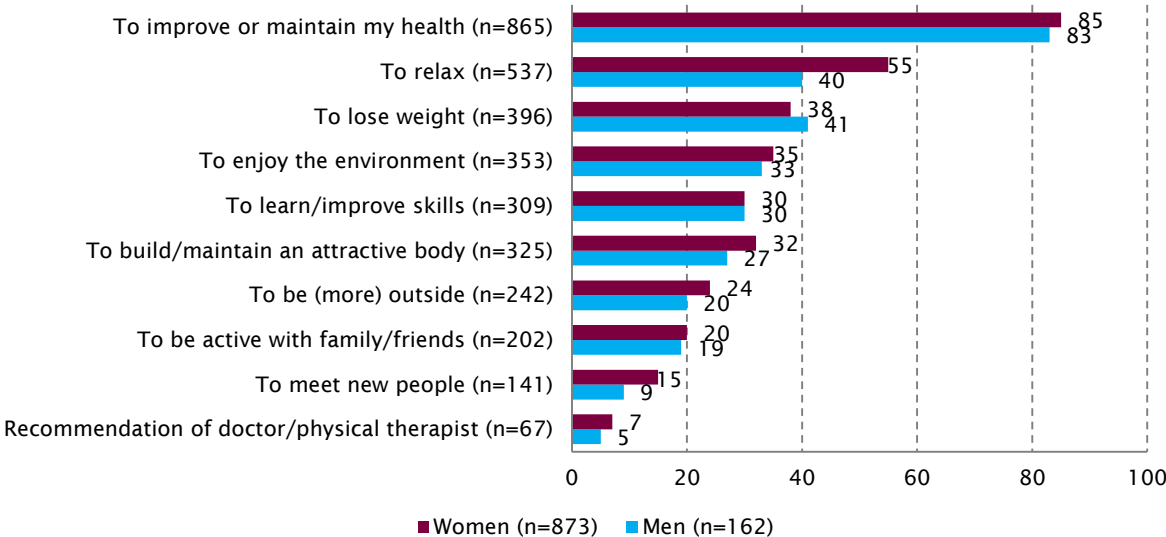
Men were more likely than women to be active in SRPA at least once a week (69% vs. 57%) and in outdoor SRPA activities (78% vs. 66%). Women respondents from Granollers would most often practice sports on a weekly basis (72%) and were the most frequently active in outdoor activities (79%). Women respondents from Corbetta (49%) were the least active in sport on a weekly basis and women from Guimarães (58%) were the least active in outdoor activities. Elderly women were less active in SRPA in general compared to younger women, but young women were least often active outdoors.

Motivations for sport participation and reasons for not being active

The main reasons women indicated for not being active weekly is the lack of time due to work/study (47%) and family obligations (42%), followed by not have anyone to be active with (23%). No females perceived themselves as being too old to be active in SRPA.

The most important motivation to be or to become more active was to improve their health for both men (83%) and women (85%), followed by ‘to relax’ (women 55%, men 40%) and to lose weight (women 38%, men 41%) (See Figure I). ‘To enjoy the environment’ was the fourth most mentioned motive by one in three women respondents, whilst one in four women (also) indicated ‘to be (more) outside’ as a motive for being active in SRPA.

Figure I Motivations of men and women for being active or wanting to become more active (outdoors) (in percentages, n=1,035, more answers possible)



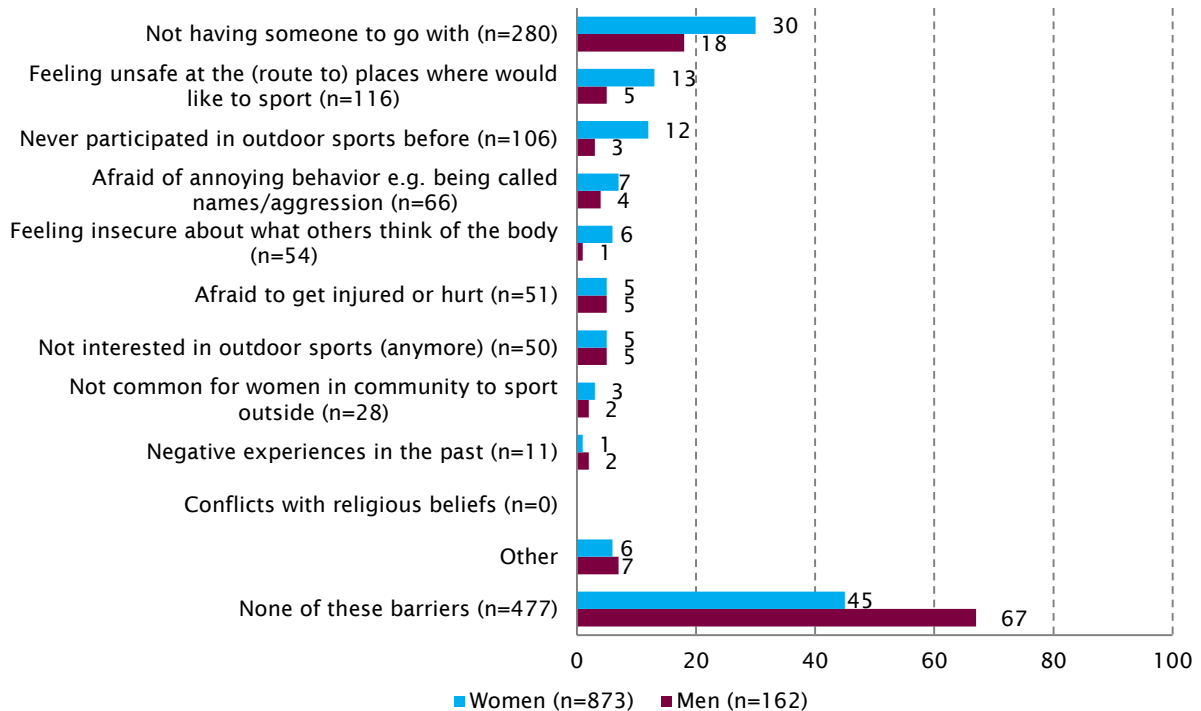
In Granollers and Sofia, enjoying the environment (resp. 44% and 47%) and being outside (resp. 38% and 43%) were most often mentioned, with both placing within the top five motivations. It was only in Ramnicu Sarat where to be (more) outside (27%, fifth place) ranked higher than enjoying the environment. Motivations relating to being outside and enjoying the environment were more often mentioned by older women; younger

women more often affirmed motives related to one’s appearance such as losing weight and building an attractive body as (extra) motivations for (outdoor) SRPA.

Perceived/experienced barriers for being active outdoors and required conditions

Although one in three women were not active outdoors, most women were interested in outdoor activities. However, more than half of all women face certain barriers, especially amongst those who were not active weekly in SRPA or only indoors (see Figure II).

Figure II Barriers experienced by women and men regarding outdoor SRPA (in percentages, n=1,035, more answers possible)



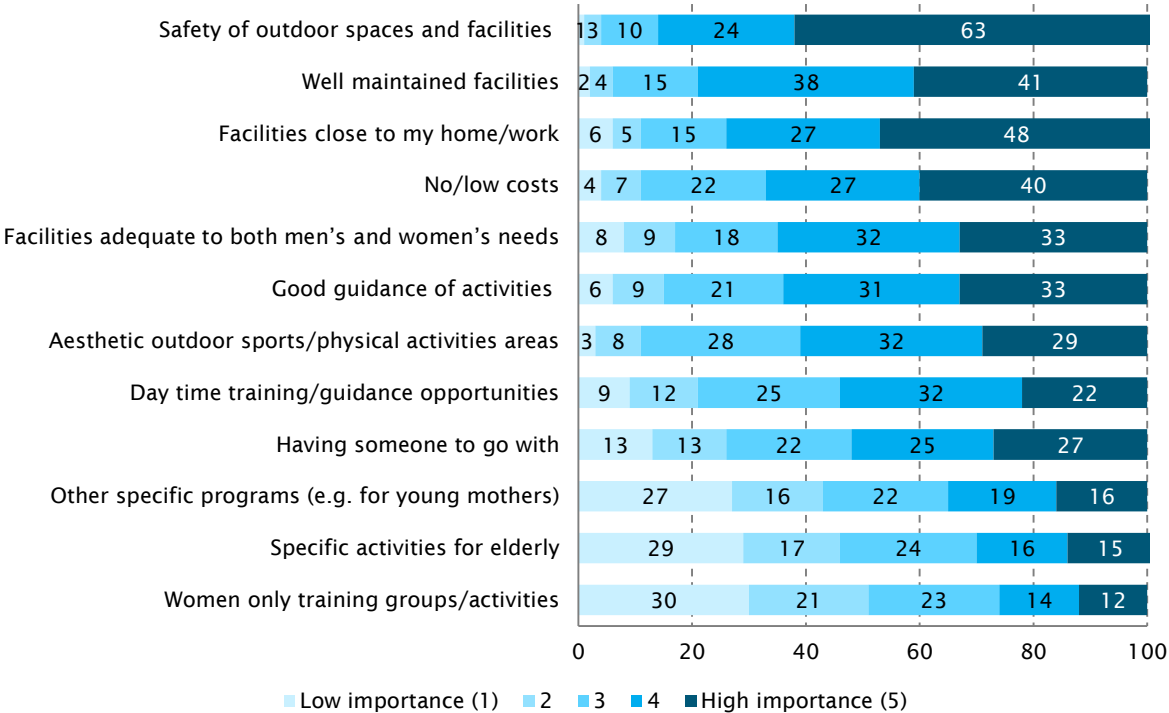
Overall, women perceive more barriers to be active in outdoor SRPA compared to men. The largest experienced barrier for women respondents is that they have no other person to go with (30%), followed by not feeling safe (13%) and never having participated before in outdoor sports (12%).

Not having someone to go with was most often perceived as a barrier for 18-35 year old women (43%) and for women from Ramnicu Sarat (47%) and Guimarães (36%). Women from Granollers (16%), Guimarães (14%) and Ramnicu Sarat (15%) most often indicated feeling unsafe as a barrier. Being afraid of annoying behaviours such as aggression or being called names was most often mentioned by women from Granollers (11%) and Ramnicu Sarat (10%).

The results show that women who were already active in outdoor SRPA perceive less, but similar barriers as those who were not active or only active indoors.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the importance of a list of conditions for being active outdoors. The majority of women and men ranked conditions in a similar way, but women generally prioritised certain conditions more strongly such as safety (women 87%, men 76%), good guidance of activities (women 64%, men 50%) and day time training/guidance opportunities (women 54%, men 39%), which reflect experienced barriers. Figure III shows the priority ranking of different conditions for the female response group.

Figure III Importance of required conditions to remain or become more active in outdoor SRPA, women (in percentages, n=873)



The participating cities scored roughly the same, with several differences emerging. Women from Sofia (mean 3.8) gave lower priority to the safety of the outdoors spaces and facilities compared to women from the other cities (mean 4.4 - 4.6). Women from Granollers and Guimarães more frequently indicated having facilities close to their home/work as a (highly) important factor than the women from the other cities. And women from Ramnicu Sarat indicated that women only activities (mean 3.7) and other specific programs were more important factors compared to women from other cities (mean 1.9 - 2.5). Regarding age, especially young women wanted someone to go with and facilities adequate to both men's and women's needs. Older women place a higher importance to activities with no/low costs.

Suggestions and good examples

The suggestions respondents gave on how to improve women's participation in outdoor SRPA are mainly related to fitting within busy working agendas and childcare responsibilities, like lunch walks or after working hours training ('Sport groups activities after 19 p.m.') and activities that provide childcare or with parallel child activities ('Offer activities in the same time and place that the children do activities'). This is especially the case for women from Corbetta, Granollers and Guimarães. Women from Ramnicu Sarat suggested, amongst other things, to create more awareness amongst women: 'To explain how important sport is for our health' and to integrate fitness (activities) in the public space: 'To build different equipment in the park like: bicycles, stepper, etc.'

Based on these findings, recommendations have been developed. One of the main recommendations was to organise a large variety of outdoor activities with a focus on health and relaxation that includes activities for groups, both in- and outside working hours and that provide childcare or family activities. Furthermore, it is important to increase the experienced safety of outdoor sporting facilities and activities, through creating more/better guidance, surveillance and lighting, and/or women's only spaces/activities. Finally, more insights are needed in the desirability of younger, older and low educated women regarding outdoor activities and their requirements.

1. Introduction

In this introductory chapter, we describe the background and objectives of this study. Furthermore, a reading guideline is provided regarding the content of the report.

Both sports and public spaces are traditionally societal domains, constructed for and dominated by men³. With many advancements having taken place and women being much more present in public spaces and mainstream sports in most Western societies, including European countries, gender equality has not been reached⁴. In nearly all member states of the European Union, men are still more likely than women to participate in sport and recreational physical activities (SRPA), including outdoor sports.

Although there are numerous advocacy and communication initiatives to enhance women's sport participation in European countries, less attention has been paid to better facilitate outdoor SRPA for women in urban environments. The project *Sports for Women in Urban Places* (SW-UP) was commissioned to gather evidence on why and how to better formulate female friendly outdoor SRPA spaces within urban environments. The project is a cooperation between different European partners⁵, coordinated by ALDA - the European Association for Local Democracy. The Mulier Institute conducted a survey amongst the adult population in the participating cities as one of the activities in the project.

Objectives

As part of this project, the Mulier Institute, has monitored the (outdoor) sport participation of women and their motives, experienced barriers, and required conditions to participate in (outdoor) SRPA. This is done by an online questionnaire which is distributed in five South and Eastern Europe cities⁶. The following objectives were central:

- Mapping the (outdoor) sport participation of women;
- To provide more knowledge on motivations, barriers and required conditions for women to practice outdoor SRPA.

Reading guide

This document presents the results of the distributed questionnaire. In the next chapter we describe the methodology and present a response profile. In Chapter Three the results of the study are presented, including a differentiation per city. Finally, in Chapter Four, we formulate the main conclusions and future recommendations.

³ See for example Aitchison (2003), Hargreaves (1994) and Massey (1994).

⁴ See European Commission (2014a, 2014b), European Institute for Gender Equality (2017), Fenster (2005), Green & Singleton (2006) and the methodological framework of analysis of the SW-UP project (SW-UP, 2018).

⁵ Istituto per la ricerca sociale scarl, Milano Italy. Câmara Municipal de Guimarães, Guimarães, Portugal. Tempo livre cipri, Guimarães, Portugal. Comune di Corbetta, Corbetta, Italy. Association La Margherita blu, Corbetta, Italy. Ajuntament de Granollers, Granollers, Spain. Mulier Instituut, Utrecht, Netherlands. Uat Ramnicu Sarat, Ramnicu Sarat, Romania. Sofia – European capital for sport, Sofia, Bulgaria.

⁶ Corbetta (Italy), Granollers (Spain), Guimarães (Portugal), Ramnicu Sarat (Romania) and Sofia (Bulgaria).

2. Method

In this chapter, the process of data collection and the content of the questionnaire are described and the main characteristics of the response group are presented.

2.1 Data collection

Data collection took place by means of an online questionnaire that was distributed amongst adult residents of the participating cities.

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was constructed in English by the Mulier Institute, in consultation with the partners, and was translated by the partners into the various languages⁷. This was done by two translators per language to ensure inter-rater validity.

The questionnaire contained items about sociodemographic positions, sports participation, attitudes regarding sports, motives, barriers and required conditions. Sociodemographic positions were specified by asking for age, gender, household situation, highest level or completed education and social position. Ethnical background or religious affiliations of respondents were not asked for after consultation with the partners.

To indicate sport participation we asked about participation in general and whether respondents were active in SRPA mainly indoors, outdoors or both. Respondents who indicated not or hardly being active in SRPA were asked about their reasons, with multiple response categories related to physical competences (e.g. 'I am not able due to poor health/disability'), social support (e.g. 'my partner does not support me'), and/or physical environment (e.g. 'there are not enough suitable places close to where I live').

All respondents were asked for general motives to be or become more physically active, including reasons relating to outdoor SRPA activities. Multiple response categories were also available, related to for example health, social factors (e.g. 'to meet new people'), physical competence (e.g. 'to learn/improve skills') and physical appearance (e.g. 'to lose weight'). Perceived barriers regarding outdoor sports included multiple answer options with respect to socialisation (e.g. 'I never participated in outdoor physical activities/sports before'), self-consciousness ('I feel insecure about what others think of my body') and experienced safety (e.g. 'I feel unsafe at the (route to) places where I would like to be active') amongst others. Required conditions were investigated through a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (lowest importance) to 5 (highest importance). Response options included the conditions of facilities, like 'well maintained facilities', the inclusiveness to women, such as 'women only training groups/activities' and social factors, for example 'having someone to go with'.

Furthermore, the questionnaire contained two open questions regarding suggestions on how to improve women's participation in outdoor SRPA and good examples of initiatives designed to foster women's participation in outdoor SRPA. The answers to these questions were translated into English by the partners.

An accompanying invitation letter (see Appendix B) was written to inform the respondents about the research and questionnaire, and invited them to fill it out, including an open web link to the online questionnaire. This letter was also translated by the partners. Although the main focus was on women, men were also welcome to fill out the questionnaire. The partners from each city were responsible for recruiting respondents. The

⁷ The one for Granollers (Spain) was translated in both Spanish and Catalan.

questionnaire was distributed via social media, through email such as the internal mail of the partners organisation, club contacts, parish councils, schools and personal contacts. The questionnaire was open for six weeks and project partners were regularly given updates on response development.

2.2 Response profile

The data gathered from the five cities were merged and resulted in a total sample of 1,426 respondents. However, 391 questionnaires were incomplete and invalid and therefore excluded from the analysis. The analysis was conducted on a total of 1,035 respondents.

The majority of the respondents were female (84%), see Table 2.1. Disregarding the relatively low response of men, other sociodemographic characteristics amongst the response groups of men and women were relatively similar.

Table 2.1 Response rate of men and women and sociodemographic characteristics (whole numbers and percentages)

		Men	Women
Total	1,035	162 (16%)	873 (84%)
Age groups			
18-35	399 (39%)	66 (41%)	333 (38%)
36-55	541 (52%)	76 (47%)	465 (53%)
56-75+	95 (9%)	20 (12%)	75 (9%)
Education level			
Low educated	242 (23%)	49 (30%)	193 (22%)
Middle educated	186 (18%)	34 (21%)	152 (17%)
High educated	607 (59%)	79 (49%)	528 (60%)
Household situation			
Without children	523 (50%)	83 (51%)	441 (50%)
With children	512 (49%)	79 (49%)	433 (50%)
Social position			
Student	162 (16%)	36 (22%)	126 (14%)
Working	794 (59%)	116 (72%)	678 (78%)
Not working	79 (7%)	10 (6%)	69 (8%)

Most respondents were middle-aged, 36 - 55 years old (52%). The low response rate in the oldest age group, 56 - 75+, may be due to the fact that recruiting respondents via social media was a common strategy. Almost half (49%) of the male respondents and even 60% of the female respondents were higher educated (college/university) (Table 2.1). We assume that this group is overrepresented and not a true reflection of the female population in the respective cities. The high number of highly educated respondents may be related to the fact that it was an online questionnaire, which was widely distributed in the network of the partners. The majority of the respondents had a paid job and about half of the respondents lived with one or more (young) children (50%). This is probably related to the fact that most respondents were middle-aged and higher educated.

Women respondents were rather well divided throughout the cities - Corbetta (23%), Granollers (22%), Guimarões (33%), Ramnicu Sarat (16%) - with only Sofia (6%) having a lower response (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Response rate of women, by cities and sociodemographic characteristics (whole numbers and percentages)

		Corbetta	Granollers	Guimarães	Ramnicu Sarat	Sofia
Total	873	202 (23%)	196 (22%)	284 (33%)	142 (16%)	49 (6%)
Age groups						
18-35	333 (38%)	36 (18%)	60 (31%)	119 (42%)	93 (65%)	25 (51%)
36-55	465 (53%)	140 (69%)	115 (59%)	141 (50%)	47 (33%)	22 (45%)
56-75+	75 (9%)	26 (13%)	21 (11%)	24 (8%)	2 (1%)	2 (4%)
Education level						
Low educated	193 (22%)	30 (15%)	28 (14%)	74 (26%)	43 (30%)	18 (37%)
Middle educated	152 (17%)	97 (48%)	31 (16%)	18 (6%)	4 (3%)	2 (4%)
High educated	528 (60%)	75 (37%)	137 (70%)	192 (68%)	95 (67%)	29 (59%)
Household situation						
Without children	440 (50%)	79 (39%)	81 (41%)	155 (54%)	90 (63%)	35 (71%)
With children	433 (50%)	123 (61%)	115 (59%)	129 (45%)	52 (37%)	14 (29%)
Social position						
Student	126 (14%)	3 (1%)	22 (11%)	40 (14%)	46 (32%)	15 (31%)
Working	678 (78%)	175 (87%)	159 (81%)	225 (79%)	90 (63%)	29 (59%)
Not working	69 (8%)	24 (12%)	15 (8%)	19 (7%)	6 (4%)	5 (10%)

While the majority of the respondents from Corbetta (69%), Granollers (59%) and Guimarães (50%) were middle-aged, the majority from Ramnicu Sarat (65%) and Sofia (51%) consisted of young women. When interpreting the results in the next chapter, this distribution must be taken into account and, in particular, no firm conclusions can be drawn for Sofia.

2.3 Analyses

Mainly bivariate analyses were conducted. On the total response group (n=1,035), comparisons were made by gender, with the response groups of men and women showing relatively similar sociodemographic characteristics. Amongst the group of women (n=873), more detailed analyses and comparisons of the various results were made by city and age, while controlling for interaction effects. Possible influences of other social demographic factors were examined as well and reported when relevant. On the outcomes regarding prioritised required conditions, multi-variate analyses were conducted. The textual data of the open questions were analysed by conducting a thematic content analysis.

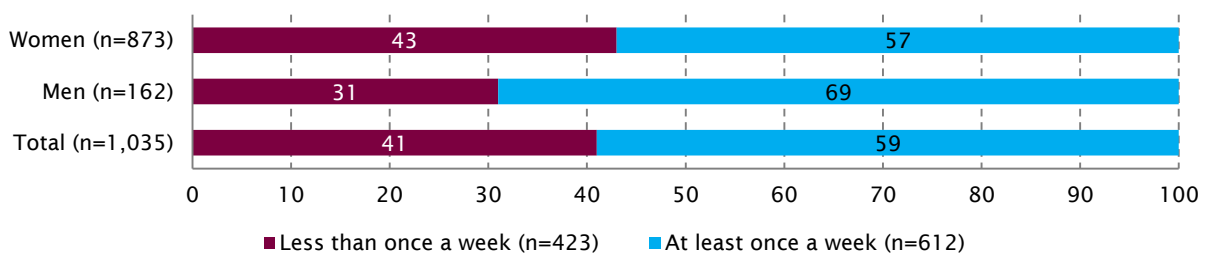
3. Results

In this chapter the results of the questionnaire are presented. At the start of each section, possible differences and similarities between men and women are indicated. Subsequently, the results based on analyses on the response group of women are displayed, both at the city level and related to age and possible other relevant aspects.

3.1 Being active in recreational physical activity and sports

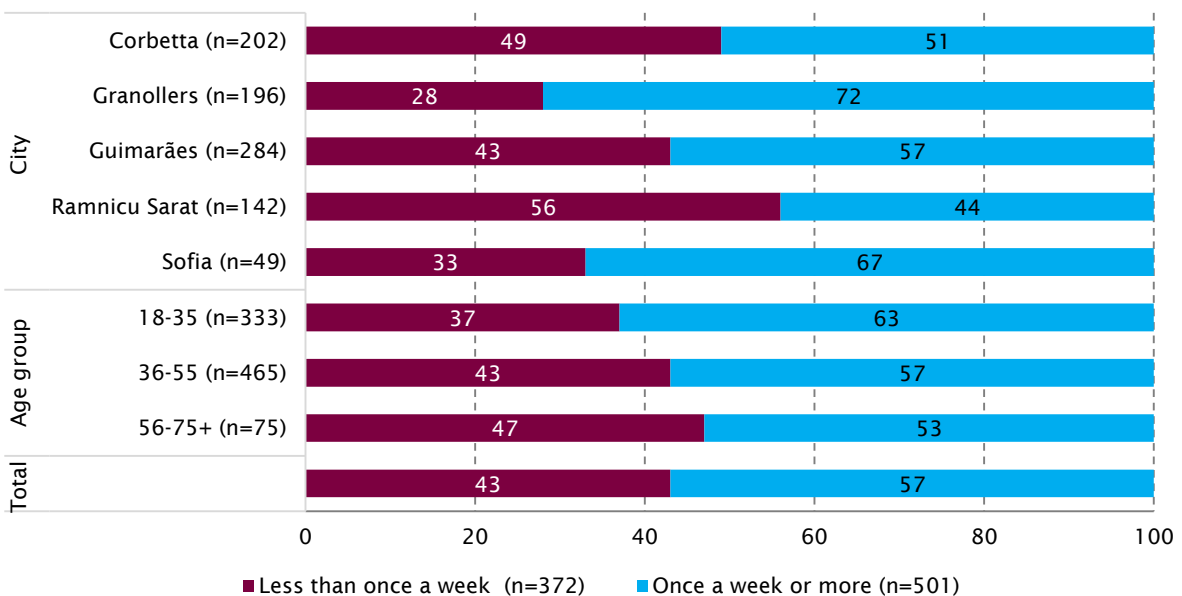
A small majority of men and women were active in SRPA at least once a week (59%). Men (69%) were more active than women (57%) (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Weekly participation in SRPA, by gender (in percentages, n=1,035)



The most active women were from Granollers (72%) and Sofia (67%). Women of Corbetta (49%) and Ramnicu Sarat (56%) were least active in SRPA on a weekly basis (Figure 3.2). When it comes to age, the older the women, the less active they were. Regarding educational level, women who are higher and middle educated were significantly more active (62% and 58%) compared to lower educated women (45%) (not in figure). Concerning the household situation, women with children (50%) were significantly less active on a weekly basis than women without children (64%) (not in figure).

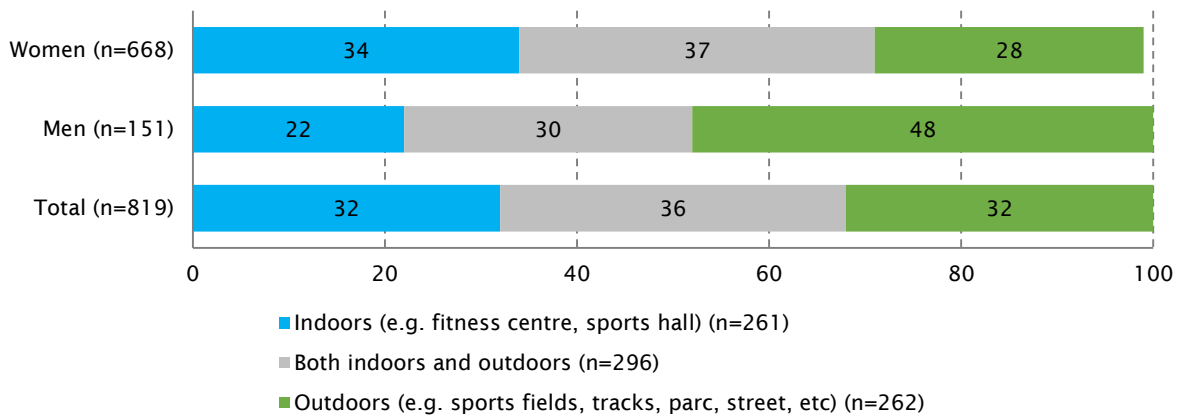
Figure 3.2 Weekly participation in SRPA of women respondents, by city and age (in percentages, n=873)



3.2 Being active outdoors

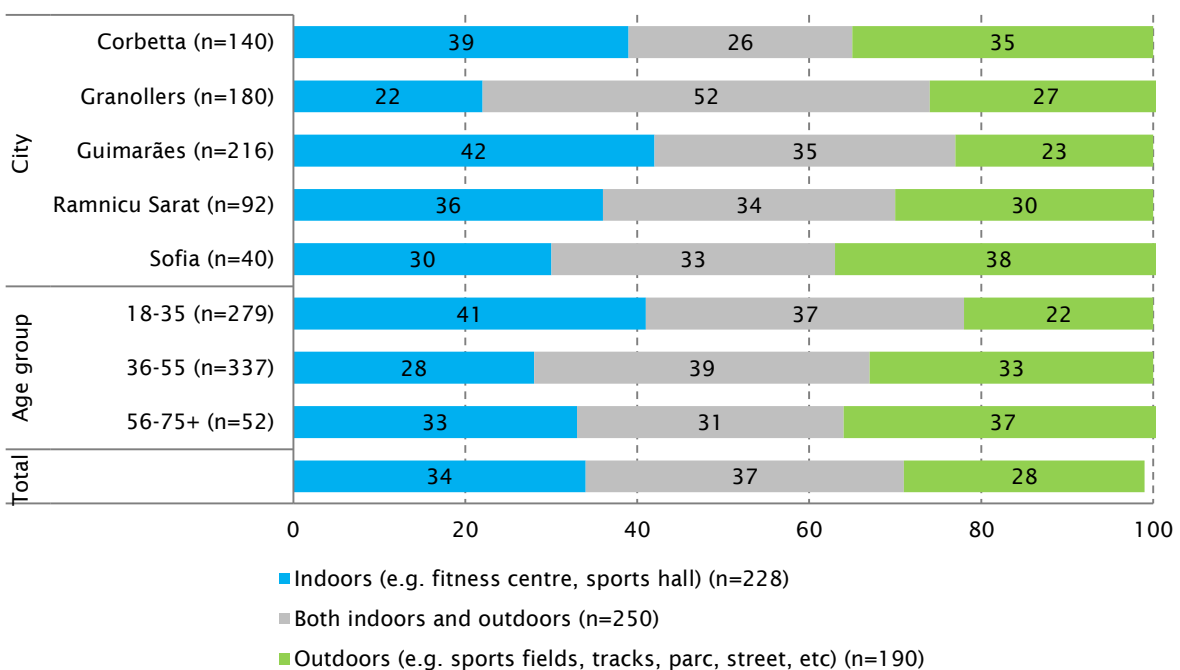
Within the overall response group that is physically active, one in three was not active outdoors. Women (66%) were additionally significantly less often active outdoors than men (78%) (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Indoor/outdoor SRPA participation, by gender (in percentages, n=819)



There were some differences between the cities, regarding to what extent women were also active outdoors. Women from Granollers (79%) most often participated in outdoor SRPA activities and women from Guimarães (58%) the least often (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Indoor/outdoor SRPA participation of women respondents, by city and age (in percentages, n=668)



Regarding age, young women were most frequently only active indoors (41%) compared to middle-aged (28%) and older women (33%) (Figure 3.4). When we specifically looked at the membership of fitness centres or sport

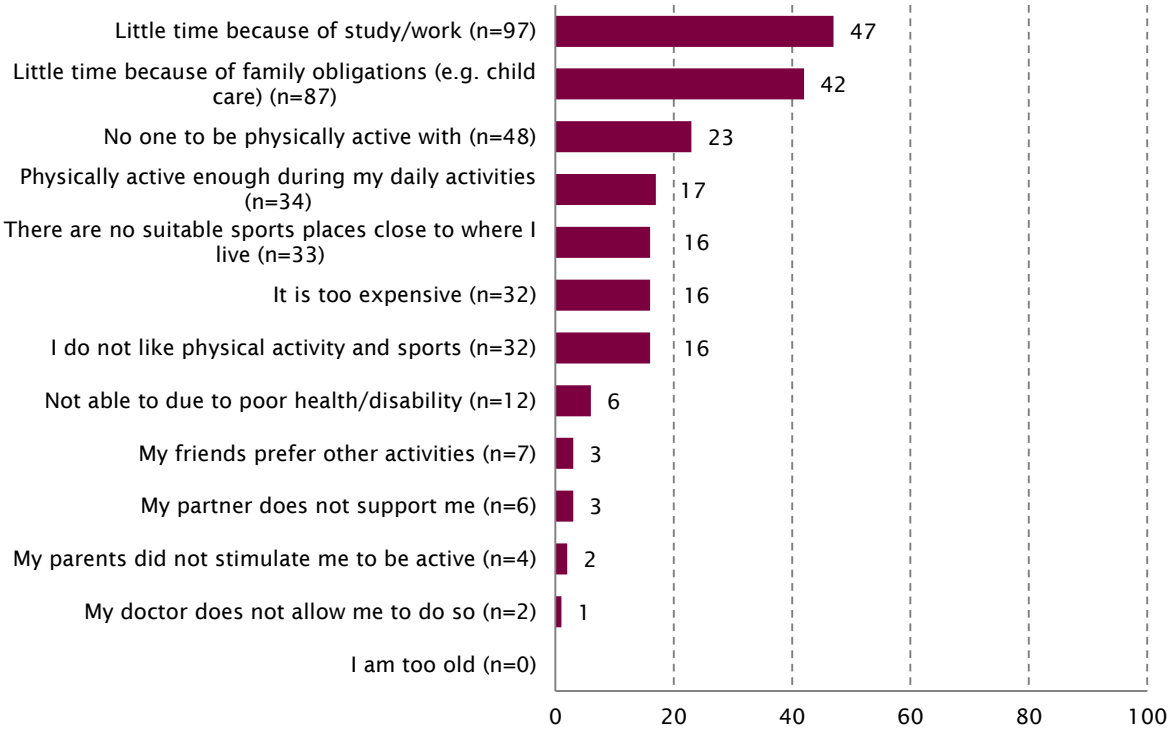
clubs, results show that young women tend to be more often only members of a fitness centre, although differences amongst women of different age groups were small⁸ (not in figure).

3.3 Reasons for not/hardly being active in SRPA

Respondents who indicated never or hardly ever being active in SRPA (n=205 women and n=11 men) were asked for their reasons for not being active (anymore). As the number of men is very small, we only show the results of the women.

Having little time due to study/work (47%) or family obligations (42%) tower above all other options (Figure 3.5). This is reported by women of all cities and makes sense considering that the middle-aged response group is the largest. The third most frequently mentioned reason female respondents indicate, is that they do not have anyone to be active with (23%) (Figure 3.5). These three factors are most often selected by all age groups. Despite the small group of elderly women in the sample, it is remarkable that none of the respondents indicated to be too old to be active in SRPA.

Figure 3.5 Reasons for not/hardly being active in SRPA (anymore); women respondents being active on a less than weekly basis (in percentages, n=205, more answers possible)

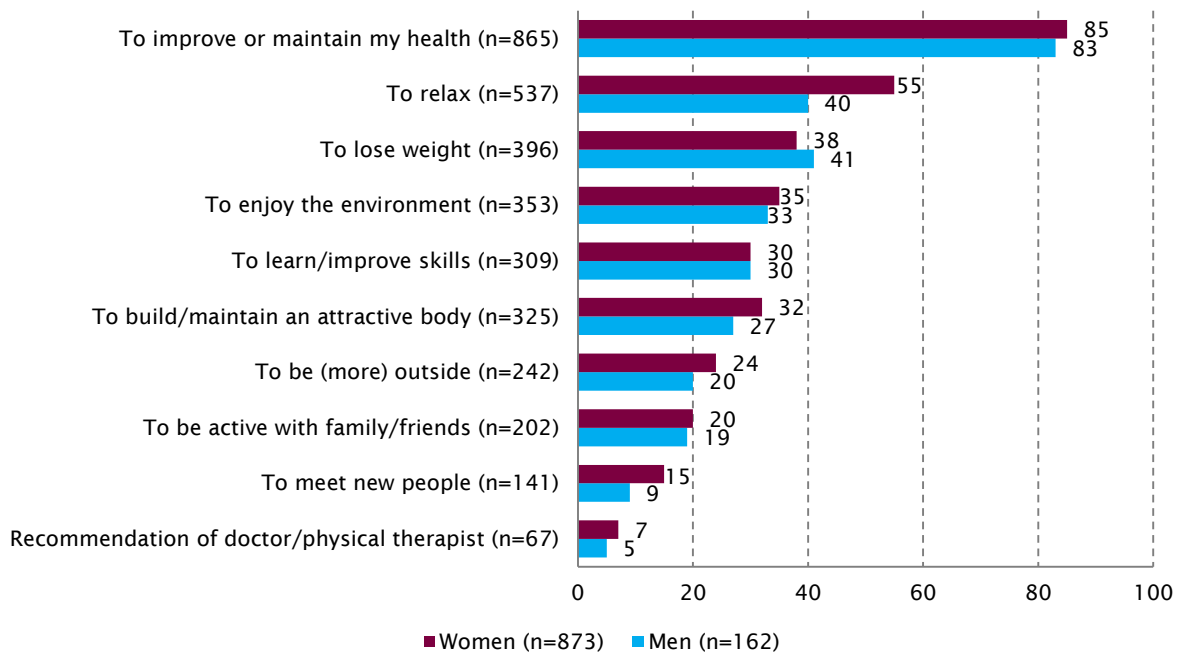


⁸ Amongst 55+ women, 37% and 10% are members of a fitness centre or both a fitness centre and a sports club, respectively. Amongst middle-aged women these figures are 37% and 7%, and within young women, 44% and 6% respectively.

3.4 Motivations for being/becoming active

All respondents were asked why they are active or why they would like to become more active. To improve their health is clearly the most important motivation for both men (83%) and women (85%), followed by ‘to relax’, a motivation significantly mentioned more often by women (55%) than by men (40%) (Figure 3.6). Overall, there were no large gender differences regarding reasons as to why they are active or would like to become more active (outdoors). Different than expected, ‘losing weight’ was not more often mentioned amongst women respondents as a motivation to be/become active. To enjoy the environment ranked fourth as a motivation for being/becoming active, mentioned by one in three women and men.

Figure 3.6 Motivations of men and women for being active or wanting to become more active (outdoors) (in percentages, n=1,035, more answers possible)



To improve their health is clearly the most crucial incentive for women regardless of their age, city of residence, social position and their household situation. Considering the motivations that follow, however, we observe some differences between the women of the participating cities.

Table 3.1 Top five motivations of women for being/becoming active in (outdoors) SRPA, by city (in percentages, n=873, more answers possible)

Corbetta (n=202)	Granollers (n=196)	Guimarães (n=284)	Ramnicu Sarat (n=142)	Sofia (n=49)
To improve or maintain health (81)	To improve or maintain health (88)	To improve or maintain health (86)	To improve or maintain health (82)	To improve or maintain health (84)
To relax (56)	To relax (61)	To learn/improve skills (56)	To relax (51)	To lose weight (49)
To lose weight (41)	To enjoy the environment (44)	To relax (55)	To lose weight (47)	To enjoy the environment (47)
To enjoy the environment (25)	To be (more) outside (38)	To build/maintain an attractive body (42)	To build/maintain an attractive body (32)	To build/maintain an attractive body (45)
To be (more) outside (26)	To lose weight (33)	To enjoy the environment (38)	To be (more) outside (27)	To be (more) outside (43)

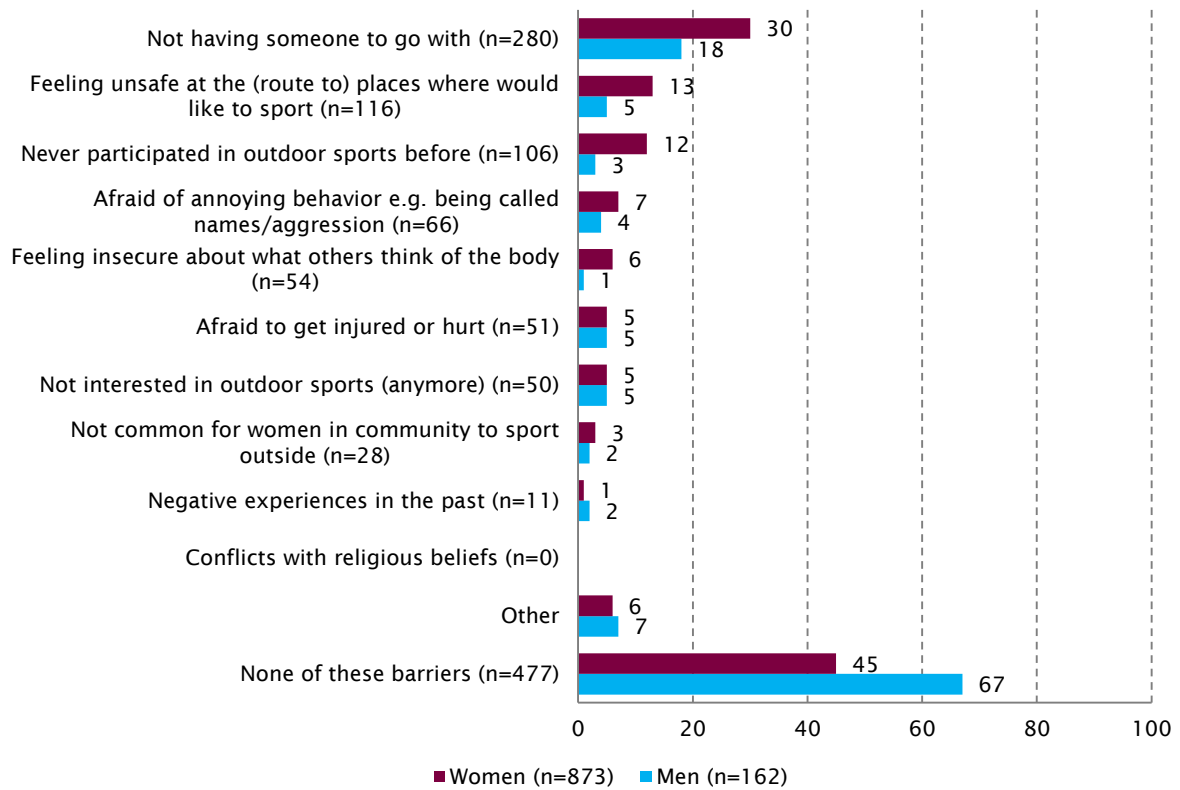
Fewer women from Sofia (35%) than the other cities (between 51% and 61%) indicated that they are active to relax. On the other hand, they indicated being motivated more often by losing weight (49%). Women from Corbetta (15%) express that to build/maintain an attractive body was significantly less of a motivation compared to the women of other cities (between 32% and 45%). Overall, concerning physical appearance to lose weight (38%), was more often mentioned than to build/maintain an attractive body (32%). To learn/improve skills was also remarkably frequently mentioned as an incentive amongst women from Guimarães (56%). Compared to the women in other cities, they mentioned the social motivations of being active with family/friends or meeting new people significantly less often (not in table). In Corbetta, Granollers and Sofia both enjoying the environment and being (more) outside were ranked in the top five. Interestingly, in Ramnicu Sarat only being outside ranked within the top five motivations and was more often reported than enjoying the environment.

Regarding age we see little differences between the age groups. One difference is that young women indicated weight loss and building/maintaining an attractive body as a motivator more often. Furthermore 'to relax', which is the second most crucial incentive for women of all ages, is more often a motivation for SRPA amongst students (53%) and working women (56%) than unemployed women (39%) (not in figure).

3.5 Barriers experienced regarding outdoor SRPA

Overall women perceived more barriers to being active in outdoor SRPA compared to men (Figure 3.7). One in three men and more than half of women experienced one or more barriers.

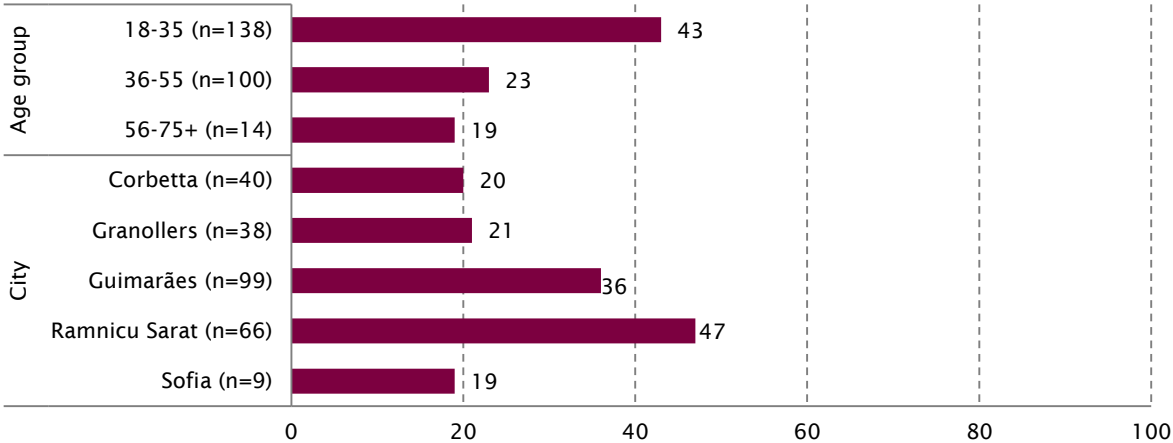
Figure 3.7 Barriers experienced by women and men regarding outdoor SRPA (in percentages, n=1,035, more answers possible)



For both men and women the largest experienced barrier is that they do not have someone to go with. This is, however, indicated significantly more by women (30%) than by men (18%). Also safety at (the route to) places and absence of earlier participation in outdoor activities are barriers also significantly more often experienced by women.

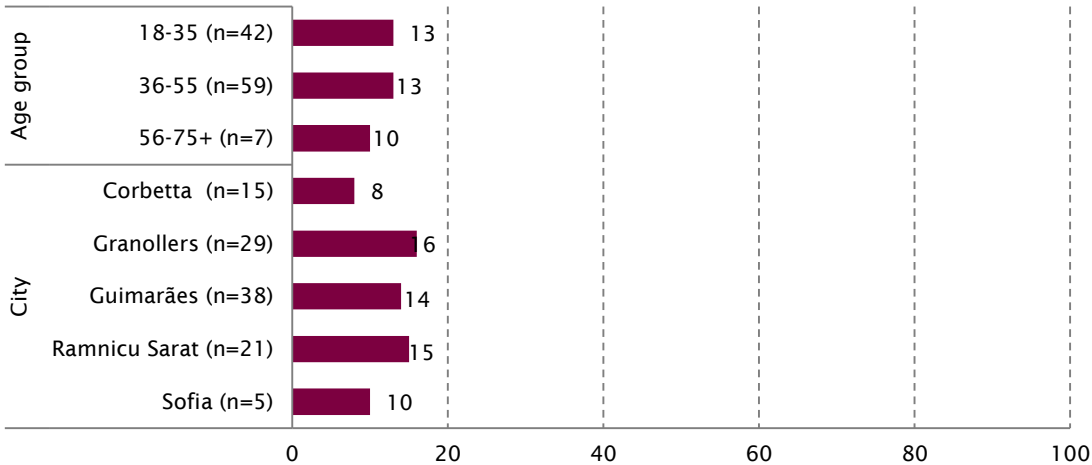
Figure 3.8 shows that ‘not having someone to go with’ is especially a relatively frequently experienced barrier for young women and women from Guimarães (36%) and Ramnicu Sarat (47%).

Figure 3.8 ‘Not having someone to go with’ as an experienced barrier amongst women regarding outdoor SRPA participation, by age and city (in percentages, n=252)



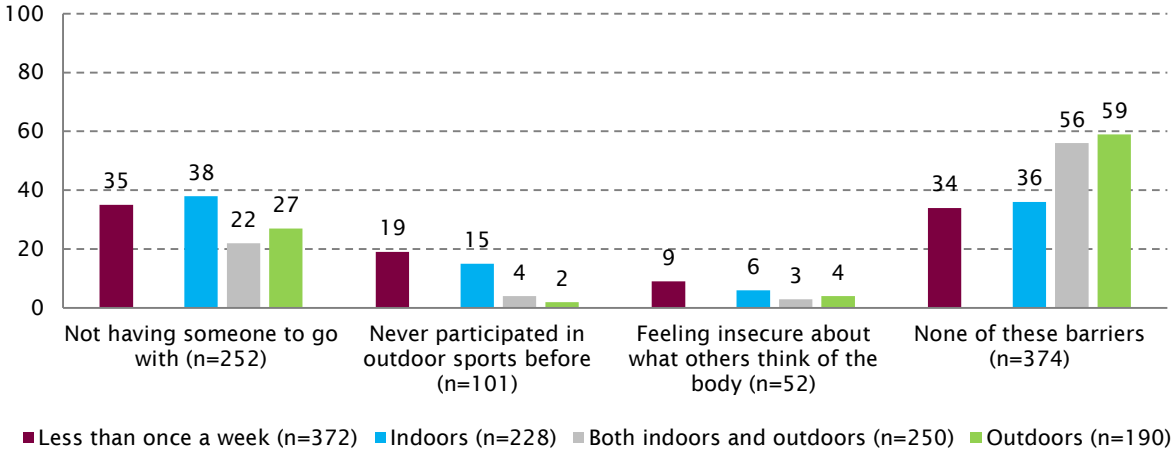
Feeling unsafe at the (route to) SRPA places (13%) - as the second most often indicated barrier amongst women overall - is reported significantly more amongst female respondents from Granollers, Guimarães and Ramnicu Sarat, compared to women from Sofia and Corbetta (Figure 3.9). Women from Granollers (11%) and Ramnicu Sarat (10%) also indicate being afraid of annoying behaviour such as aggression or being called names more often (not in figure). Women of all ages, but especially younger and middle-aged women with and without children, experience unsafety and/or fear as barrier for being (more) active.

Figure 3.9 ‘Feeling unsafe at (the route to) the places where they would like to be active’ as experienced barrier among women regarding outdoor SRPA, by age and city (in percentages, n=108)



Overall, the results show that women who are already active in outdoor SRPA perceive less, but similar barriers as those who are not active or who are only active indoors (Figure 3.10). For example, also amongst women who are active outdoors, not having someone to go with is the most reported barrier, indicated by one in four women.

Figure 3.10 Barriers experienced regarding outdoor SRPA, by the place where active women are mainly active (in percentages, n=873, more answers possible)

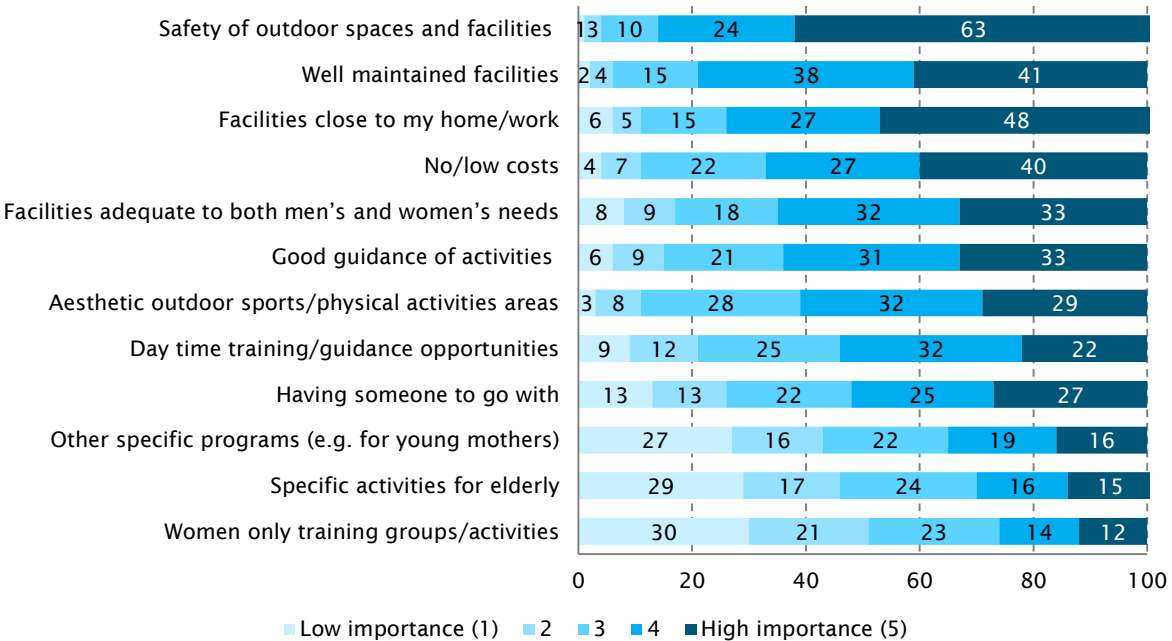


The findings also show that women who are mainly active indoors perceive barriers for outdoor SRPA to a similar extent as women who are not/hardly active in SRPA.

3.6 Required conditions for remaining or becoming active in SRPA

The results regarding the priorities given to required conditions for remaining or becoming active in SRPA partly echo the experienced and perceived barriers. Safe outdoor spaces and facilities (e.g. adequate lighting; emergency facilities, etc.) is regarded as the most important condition, as reported for nine out of ten women (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11 Importance of required conditions to remain or become more active in outdoor SRPA, women respondents (in percentages, n=873)



In total, men and women ranked the importance of required conditions in similar ways (Table 3.2). Men also placed a significant weight on well-maintained facilities (77%) and safety (76%). However, women gave significantly more importance to safety, facilities being close to their home or work, minimal costs, the presence of good guidance (e.g. certified coaches), day time training and guidance opportunities.

Table 3.2 Differences in (highly) important required conditions between men and women to remain or become more active in outdoor SRPA (in percentages and means, n=1,035)

	Women (n=873)		Men (n=162)	
	Percentage	Mean	Percentage	Mean
Safety of outdoor spaces and facilities	87%	4.5	76%	4.1
Well maintained facilities	79%	4.1	77%	4.0
Facilities close to home/work	75%	4.1	68%	3.8
No/low costs	67%	3.9	60%	3.7
Facilities adequate to both men's and women's needs	65%	3.8	62%	3.3
Good guidance of activities	64%	3.8	50%	3.6
Aesthetic outdoor sports/physical activities areas	61%	3.7	57%	3.7
Day time training/guidance opportunities	54%	3.5	39%	3.1
Having someone to go with	52%	3.4	41%	3.1
Other specific programs	35%	2.8	19%	2.8
Specific activities for elderly	31%	2.7	31%	2.8
Women only training groups/activities	26%	2.6	16%	2.2

Women respondents from different cities scored roughly the same on the required conditions, with some slight differences. For example, less than one third of the women from Sofia indicated the safety of the outdoors spaces and facilities as (highly) important, compared to a range from 84% to 93% in other cities (Table 3.3). Women from Granollers (82%) and Guimarães (81%) reported facilities close to home/work as a (highly) important factor more frequently than the women from the other cities (61% to 75%) (Table 3.3). For Ramnicu Sarat we see a few outliers, which seem partly related to the fact that the lowest number of women are active in SRPA here (cf. Figure 3.2). Facilities close to their home/work is given less importance compared to women in other cities, whereas having someone to go with, women only activities/facilities, and other specific programs are weighted more heavily.

Table 3.3 Significant city differences amongst women respondents in required conditions to remain or become more active in outdoor SRPA (in percentages and means, n=873)

		Corbetta (n=202)	Granollers (n=196)	Guimaraes (n=284)	Ramnicu Sarat (n=142)	Sofia (n=49)
Safety of outdoor spaces and facilities	(Highly) important	84%	91%	93%	85%	61%
	Mean	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.5	3.8
Facilities close to home/work	(Highly) important	66%	82%	81%	61%	75%
	Mean	3.8	4.4	4.2	3.8	4.1
Other specific programs	(Highly) important	35%	29%	37%	49%	12%
	Mean	2.8	2.7	2.9	3.1	2.2
Women only training/group activities	(Highly) important	21%	15%	20%	60%	12%
	Mean	2.5	2.1	2.4	3.7	1.9
Having someone to go with	(Highly) important	38%	42%	66%	69%	42%
	Mean	2.9	3.1	3.8	3.9	3.1

Concerning age, a higher proportion of older women (80%) indicated having no or little costs (highly) important compared to two-thirds of both young and middle-aged women (Table 3.4). Younger women, in turn, give more weight to facilities fitting in with both men's and women's needs and that they have someone to go with.

Table 3.4. Significant age differences amongst women respondents in required conditions to remain becoming active in outdoor SRPA (in percentages and means, n=873)

		18-35 (n=399)	36-55 (n=541)	56-75+ (n=95)
No/low costs	(Highly) important	66%	66%	80%
	Mean	3.9	3.8	4.1
Facilities adequate to both men's and women's needs	(Highly) important	75%	60%	58%
	Mean	4.0	3.6	3.6
Having someone to go with	(Highly) important	80%	46%	50%
	Mean	3.7	3.1	3.3

On all optional required conditions we conducted a multivariate analysis (linear regression) amongst the women respondents to see which factors (e.g. sociodemographic characteristics, sport participation) influenced the given priorities, controlled for other factors (see Table A1 in the appendix)⁹. The outcomes show that, apart from several differences between cities regarding the prioritisation of several conditions, the sociodemographic variables age, educational level, working full time and living with children all influence the experienced importance of some of the listed conditions. For example, higher educated women give higher

⁹ For example when respondents from a certain city respond differently this may be related to the fact that the specific city sample is younger and therefore the direct effect is age and not (also) location.

priority to outdoor facilities/activities being close to home/work. Some of the abovementioned differences regarding age, were not found to be significant anymore in the regression analysis, losing their explanatory power. For example, in the regression analysis, age did not show any effect to 'no/low costs' and 'having someone to go with'. Overall the total explanatory power of the included factors (the R²) turned out to be relatively low for most conditions. Only for 'having someone to go with' and 'women only groups/activities', did the model explain more than 10% of the total variance, with the strongest effects present for differences between cities and sport participation. These outcomes show that these conditions for participating in outdoor SRPA are more important for women who are not active sport participants.

3.7 Improving gender equity in outdoor SRPA: suggestions & good examples

Respondents were asked to give suggestions on how to improve women's participation in outdoor SRPA and if they are aware of good examples of current initiatives. Below we will discuss the results per city. With regards to good examples, only the concrete/existing initiatives are mentioned. Other good examples such as a hiking group for women, Zumba and so on are included as suggestions.

Corbetta

Women from Corbetta are busy and therefore it is important to fit outdoor SRPA around their agenda. This can be achieved by organising something at appropriate times: *'Sport during lunch break close to work' and 'Sport groups activities after 19 p.m.'*

However, a large proportion of the women's agendas were taken up by parental obligations. The respondents therefore recommended that the responsibilities surrounding the children should be covered: *'Having possible support for children' and 'Practice sport in parallel to children's activities'*. Furthermore, according to the respondents it is desirable that the organised activities and courses involve little or no costs.

As far as good examples are concerned, no specific existing initiatives have been mentioned. However, there are examples of activities that respondents say will contribute to women's outdoor sport participation, namely courses for new mothers, Nordic walking, yoga, cross-fit and activities on Women's Day.

Granollers

To make the activities suitable for everyone, a large group of respondents suggested to create activities that fit in with different levels and agendas: *'Create activities in different schedules (mornings, midday, evenings and weekends)' and 'Create activities for specific groups of women who need a moderate physical activity and who will not be involved in doing physical activity with more prepared people'*.

However, more is needed. Namely improving the spaces where outdoor SRPA can be practiced. This can be done by better lighting: *'To improve the lighting of the park around the river'*, surveillance: *'Rangers'* and the appearance: greener areas and facilities: *'More water sources' and 'Bike track circuit'*.

To make outdoor SRPA attractive for women with children, it is important to create approaches that fit with family life. According to the respondents, this can be done by: *'Babysitting service - play centre' or 'Sports with children'*. In addition, it is useful to: *'Offer activities in the same time and place that the children do activities'*.

Moreover, according to the respondents, it would help if group activities were organised. SRPA can then be seen as a social activity. For example, yoga or walking groups can be created. In addition to being more sociable, training in a group is also safe: *'To promote groups of women with similar interests in sports'*

practice, since if sport also becomes a social activity, the practice of sport is consolidated with time and doing it in groups makes us feel safer'.

Finally a lot of good examples were named. Such examples were from Granollers itself, for example *'To start doing the Half'* a training program to run a half marathon, *'Mama fit'* activities for pregnant women and a Master Class given by different sport providers. Good examples from other cities were *'Women's career in Barcelona'* and *'Unirun'*, which is a university race.

Guimarães

Three opinions prominently emerged from the responses of the respondents from Guimarães. The first piece of advice may not be that easy to apply, but it appears to be a barrier when it comes to (outdoor) SRPA. This concerns reducing/increasing the flexibility of the workload: *'Decrease daily tasks (employment + household chores + children + ...) that you have to accomplish through facilitating social/political measures'*, *'Decreasing work at home'*, *'The companies can promote one-hour within work hours for physical exercise'* and *'Greater flexibility in working hours and family support'*. That is why it is also important that working women are taken into account when making the schedules for organised activities: *'Take into account the compromise of family and working life while defining the schedules'*.

Second, it is often mentioned that the organised activities must be suitable for the whole family or allow women to take their children with them: *'Family activities'*, *'Activities that can be done with children, including infants'* and *'The possibility to take the children with you'*.

Thirdly, a recurring remark from the respondents is on the safety at and around the spaces where outdoor SRPA is possible: *'Security is essential'*, *'More publicity, more lighting in some of the urban spaces and leisure parks, vigilance (especially at the end of the day and early evening)'* and *'More safety in city parks'*.

Regarding the types of activities that respondents advice, varying answers emerged. For example walking, jogging, Zumba, cycling, yoga, and Pilates. Furthermore, according to the respondents, it is good if the activities fit in with different age groups and are supervised: *'Promoting of group sports activities that are more appropriate to the various age groups'*, *'Group lessons suitable for all ages'* and *'Group-guided hikes by teachers'*. The set-up of the group activities also regularly returns: *'Classes for mothers'* and *'Walking groups'*.

Good examples that were mentioned are *'Guimarães corre corre'* which is an organised physical activity event with the purpose to encourage the population to practice SRPA. Second the *'Sporting Sundays'* coordinated by the Parish Council of Selho S. Jorge and Gymnasium Biba Mais, during the months May and June were also reported.

Ramnicu Sarat

In the first place, it is important that women know what possibilities exists regarding outdoor SRPA. Respondents therefore advise to create more visibility of the possibilities that exist in the city or the activities that are being organised: *'Some flyers, using Facebook to promote activities'* and *'Invitations, meetings, promoted through different ways'*. To give women an extra push, example figures can be used (in the promotion) such as Roxana Vancea, Simona Halep or the female soccer team AC ONIX, Ramnicu Sarat: *'Feminine examples/models in sport should be more exposed to the public by the TV and in public meetings'*.

Based on respondents' replies, it appears that fitness and dancing are popular activities that would benefit the women from Ramnicu Sarat. It is often advised to place fitness equipment in public spaces: *'To build different equipment in the park like: bicycles, stepper, etc.'*, *'To organise from time to time fitness activities, kizomba, etc. in order to change the mentality about outdoor exercises'* and *'Outdoor dance'*. Running is also

regularly mentioned in the suggestions. This is usually linked to organising a competition: *'Color run', 'Marathons/walking, with pink or colored t-shirts'*.

In addition, according to the respondents, it is advisable *'To design specific places or activities'* for women. The presence of certified supervisors at those places would encourage participation according to them: *'Well-being with different facilities and equipment including instructors/trainers in order to initiate different sports'*, and *'Specialised people, considering that in our city we have people with health problems'*. Opinions are divided as to whether these places should be only for women or for both men and women: *'A well designed place for women'*, *'To design functional places, considering the concept of diversity'* and *'Not only for women'*. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that some women have children: *'The possibility to take children with me'* and *'A special place without any dangers where mothers are able to come with their child, without fear'*.

However, in order to make it easier for women to actually make use of the options available, the routes to and from relevant places will have to be refurbished according to the respondents: *'To rebuild the pedestrian road to the stadium'* and *'To create a pedestrian route to the city for cycling'*. However, it is important that those roads or places are safe and free from cars and dogs: *'To collect the homeless dogs because you want to do some jogging, you need to skip at least five or ten'*. Finally, it is indicated that it is imperative to better communicate the necessity of SRPA towards women, *'To ensure the importance for women'* and *'To explain how important sport is for our health'*.

As a good example, the hashtag *'#ICAN'* is mentioned. This hashtag promotes all kind of movement and the idea to go beyond your limits.

Sofia

Unfortunately the response on these particular questions was rather low. The following was mentioned: *'To provide nearby childcare services for young children and children under two years of age. I personally find this to be the biggest obstacle for me. If more sports halls offer part-time attendance, I would be actively involved in many sports activities'* and *'More clean, beautiful, modern and affordable facilities in the mountains. Women love the mountain!'* No concrete good examples were given.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, on the basis of the results presented in the previous chapter, we will draw conclusions and give recommendations.

Conclusions

The findings show that half of the urban women respondents was active less than once a week in sports or recreational physical activities. Moreover amongst the active women, one in three is only active indoors. Compared to men, women are both less active in SRPA in general and are less active in outdoor SRPA, confirming earlier found gender differences in sport participation and outdoor leisure in many European countries. This is, in reality, even lower in view of the inadequate representativeness of the response group in this study (see for example European Commission, 2014a; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017).

Overall older women (55+) turned out to be less active in SRPA in general, but amongst SRPA participants younger women (18-35 years) were least active outdoors. Women respondents from Granollers (Spain) were most active both in general and in outdoor SRPA. Women from Ramnicu Sarat (Romania) were least active in SRPA in general and amongst SRPA participants, women from Guimarães were least active.

The main motivations for both men and women for being or becoming active in SRPA are to improve/maintain health and to relax. The incentive of relaxation was more often mentioned by women. This motivation partly mirrors the main reasons for not being active in SRPA (anymore), which are little time because of study/work and/or family obligations (e.g. child care). Since the majority of the women respondents work full time and combine their jobs with family care responsibilities - which are still largely gendered with women spending more time on this realm than men - this 'double work load' seems to be both a major barrier ('no time') and motivation ('a moment to escape daily hassles') for participation in SRPA. Factors related to one's appearance such as losing weight and building an attractive body were more often (extra) motivations for young women, whereas older women more often mentioned being outside and enjoying the environment as important motives. Overall one or both of these outdoor motivations ranked within the top five of being/becoming active in SRPA.

Most of the women, disregarding SRPA participation, were interested in outdoor activities, but many of them faced barriers, even amongst those who were already active outdoors. About four in ten of the women already active in outdoor SRPA experienced barriers, and two out of three amongst women who are not active outdoors. The most experienced or perceived barriers refer to having no one to go with, to feelings of unsafety and never having participated in outdoor SRPA before, all factors being more often mentioned by women than men. These outcomes confirm that public (sport) spaces and (outdoor) SRPA activities are gendered and women experience more barriers towards participation.

The required conditions for being/becoming active in outdoor SRPA amongst women partly reflect the experienced barriers. Safe spaces and well-maintained facilities are given the highest importance. Furthermore facilities close to home or work, no or low costs, adequate to women's needs and with good guidance are reported to be of (highest) importance amongst two-thirds of female respondents. Day time opportunities and having someone to go with are indicated with the (highest) importance by half of the women active or interested in outdoor SRPA. Overall the ranking of these conditions was rather similar, although again several differences existed between cities, current outdoor SRPA participation and sociodemographic characteristics like age, educational level, working full time and having children.

Women from all cities advocate to create more safe places and routes (e.g. good lighting, coaches and little traffic and stray dogs) and suggest to create more fitting opportunities with the busy working agendas and childcare responsibilities to improve women's participation in outdoor SRPA.

Recommendations

The findings clearly show how social and safety aspects are important experiences and perceived barriers, indicated as conditions of highest importance to remain/become active in SRPA. Therefore it is important to increase the experienced safety of outdoor sporting facilities and activities, through creating more/better guidance, surveillance and lighting and/or women's only spaces/activities.

Furthermore, it is important to organise a broad variety of outdoor activities with a focus on health and relaxation that includes activities for individuals and groups, opportunities in- and outside working hours and activities providing childcare or family activities.

Finally, since the response group of women was not a representative group (mainly higher educated middle-aged women), more insights are required on both the (outdoor) SRPA participation and the specific needs and requirements of young women, older women and lower educated women to remain/become active in outdoor activities. In order to make the questionnaire accessible to both low and highly educated young women, it is important to promote it on different (online) platforms. For example, a regularly visited local (Facebook) page where activities in the city are being announced or posters/flyers at local cafés and bars could serve as possible points of contact. To reach (low educated) older women it is advisable to deploy volunteers/students in shopping centres and supermarkets to fill out the questionnaire together with those women. This is also a convenient method to reach migrant women. However, good instructions are required to decently fill out the questionnaire together. Furthermore, reaching specific groups like older and/or migrant women can be best done by key figures and organisations. For example, through elderly or migrant organisations. Lastly, it is of added value if the cities exchanged best practices with regards to reaching those women.

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Appendix

Table A1 Linear regression outcomes for required conditions for women to participate in SRPA, only significant expected B's (p < .05 are reported)¹⁰

	Close to home/ work	Well maintained	Adequate for men & women	Aesthetic outdoor areas	Safe outdoor spaces/ facilities	No/low costs	Day time training/ guidance opportunities	Having someone to go with	Good guidance of activities	Women only training groups/ activities	Specific activities for elderly	Specific programs
<i>City¹</i>												
Corbetta	-.086	-.170	-.139			-.084		-.187		.096		
Granollers	.109		.146				.082					
Ramnicu Sarat	-.124	-.075		.116		-.206				.350	.118	
Sofia					-.134	-.129	-.094		-.112			-.093
<i>Personal factors</i>												
Age (young→old)			-.124								.076	-.134
Educational level (low→high)	.144										-.123	-.081
Living with children			-.089					-.110				
Working full time				.083	.096			-.077				
<i>Sport participation</i>												
SRPA frequency (low→ high)	-.100					-.144		-.174		-.115		-.085
Active outdoors ²							-.120		-.136			
Adjusted R ²	6.0%	4.2%	7.6%	1.7%	2.3%	5.3%	3.0%	10.1%	3.0%	15.0%	3.7%	3.7%

¹ Reference category = Guimarães

² Reference category = Only active indoors

¹⁰ The higher the expected B's, the larger the effect. For example, the highest effect is found for women from Ramnicu Sarat giving a higher priority to women only activities/facilities compared to the reference category, which are women from Guimarães. Negative effects show a negative relation from the factor (e.g. full time working) on the dependent factor (e.g. need someone to go with).

Questionnaire and accompanying letter

We invite you to complete a questionnaire about **outdoor recreational physical activities and sports, especially for women**. It is part of the larger SW-UP project aimed at enhancing women's participation in outdoor sports and physical activity in urban areas in several member states of the European Union.

Please try to answer all questions. Completing the questionnaire will take less than ten minutes. The survey is completely anonymous.

If you have questions about the questionnaire please contact *[Name local contact]*. *[Telephone number and email]*.

Sincerely,

SW-UP

[Name senior manager local partner]

1. What is your age?

- 18 - 25
- 26 - 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 - 65
- 65 - 75
- 75+

2. What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman

3. In which city do you live?

- Corbetta
- Granollers
- Guimarães
- Ramnicu Sarat
- Sofia
- Other, namely _____

4. What corresponds best to your own current household situation?

- I live with my parent(s)/guardian(s)
- I live on my own
- I live in a student apartment
- I live with a partner/spouse without children
- I am a single parent and live with my child(ren)
- I live with a partner/spouse with child(ren)
- Other, namely _____

5. [Select if Q4 - answer 5/6] What is the age of the youngest child?

— —

6. What is the highest level of education you completed?

- I never followed any education
- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Secondary vocational education
- College/university (bachelor/master degree)

7. How would you describe your social position at the moment? Choose the answer that most applies to you.

- I am a pupil/student
- I am in part time employment
- I am in full time employment
- I am a housewife/houseman
- I am unemployed
- I am incapacitated
- I am retired
- Other, namely _____

8. Are you active in recreational physical activities/sports? Please keep an average week of the last twelve months in mind.

- No, never/hardly
- Yes, 1 to 3 times a month
- Yes, 1 to 2 times a week
- Yes, 3 times a week or more

[Select if Q8 - 1]

9. What are the reasons that you are not physically active (anymore)? *More answers possible.*

- I do not like physical activity and sports
- I am physically active enough during my daily activities
- My parents did not stimulate me to be active
- My doctor does not allow me to do so
- My partner does not support me
- I have no one to be physically active with
- My friends prefer other activities
- I have little time because of study/work
- I have little time because of family obligations (e.g. child care)
- It is too expensive
- There are no suitable sports places close to where I live
- I am too old
- I am not able to due to poor health/disability

[Select if Q8- 2-4]

10. Are you member of a fitness centre or sports club?

- No
- Yes only fitness centre (commercial)
- Yes, only sports club (voluntary association)
- Yes, both fitness centre and sports club

[Select if Q8- 2-4]

11. Do you participate mainly in indoor or outdoor sports/physical activities?

- Indoors (e.g. fitness centre, sports hall)
- Outdoors (e.g. sports fields, tracks, parc, street, etc)
- Both indoors and outdoors

12. Why are you active or would you like to become more active in (outdoor) recreational physical activity/sport?. *More answers possible.*

- To improve or maintain my health
- To learn/improve skills
- To lose weight
- To build/maintain an attractive body
- To relax
- To meet new people
- To be active with family/friends
- Recommendation of doctor/physical therapist
- To be (more) outside
- To enjoy the environment
- Other, namely _____

- None of these reasons [single option]

13. Please indicate which of the following barriers you experience regarding *outdoor* recreational physical activity/sport. *More answers possible.*

- I am not interested in being active outdoors (anymore)
- I never participated in outdoor physical activities/sports before
- I had negative experiences in the past
- I am afraid that I could get injured or hurt
- I feel insecure about what others think of my body
- I do not have someone to go with
- I am afraid of annoying behavior such as being called names or aggression
- It is not common for girls and women in my community to be physically active/sport outside
- I feel unsafe at the (route to) places where I would like to be active
- It conflicts with my religious beliefs
- Other, namely _____

- None of these barriers [single option]

[Select if NOT Q12 'none of these reasons' OR Q13-1]

14. How important are the following conditions for you to remain or become more active in outdoor recreational physically active/sport.

[1-5 options; 1 lowest importance - 5 highest importance].

- Facilities close to my home/work
- Well maintained facilities
- Facilities adequate to both men's and women's needs
- Aesthetic outdoor sports/physical activities areas
- Safety of outdoor spaces and facilities (e.g. adequate lighting; emergency facilities, etc.)
- No/low costs
- Day time training/guidance opportunities
- Having someone to go with
- Good guidance of activities (e.g. certified coaches)
- Women only training groups/activities
- Specific activities for elderly
- Other specific programs (e.g. for young mothers)
- Other (specify):

15. Could you give us any suggestions on how to improve women's participation in outdoor sports and recreational physical activity?

.....
.....
.....

16. Are you aware of any good examples of initiatives aimed at favouring women's participation in outdoor sports and recreational physical activity?

.....
.....
.....

This publication is the result of the Erasmus+ funded project SWUP (Sport for Women in Urban Places), led by a consortium of 10 partner organisations established in 6 EU countries, from January 2018 to June 2019. The project aims to tackle women's barriers to outdoor sports/physical activity in urban spaces and promote an increased participation of women in outdoor physical activity/sports and their equal access to urban spaces for outdoor sports.

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- Tempo Livre, Guimarães, Portugal;
- Comune di Corbetta, Corbetta, Italy;
- APS Polisportiva Corbetta 2015 ASD Onlus, Corbetta, Italy;
- Ajuntament de Granollers, Granollers, Spain;
- Uat Ramnicu Sarat, Ramnicu Sarat, Romania;
- Sofia - European capital for sport, Sofia, Bulgaria.

