



MISCELLANEA

Péter Várnagy*

Pécs

Éva Szederkényi**

Pécs

The Role of Scouting in Physical Education at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Abstract

This article highlights the existing evidence for the interdependence between scouting and sport in Hungary and in other parts of the world at the beginning of the 20th century (1912–1932).

Keywords: Scouting, sports, mental and physical health

Słowa kluczowe: skauting, zdrowie duchowe i fizyczne

From the foundation of the Hungarian Scout Association (1912) to the present day a great emphasis has been placed on maintaining a harmonious balance between the physical and mental personality development in youth education. In the following pages, the authors would like to highlight the existing evidence for the interdependence between scouting and sport in Hungary and in other parts of the world at the beginning of the 20th century (1912–1932).

The Stockholm Olympic Games (1912) highlighted the importance of scouting for boys, which was invented by Lord Baden-Powell at the beginning of the century, and in particular for the enhancement of their sports performance. At that time, this relationship was voiced strongly in contemporary sports press around the world, including in Hungary, for example in the “Magyar Cserkész” (Hungarian Scout) and in “Zászlónk” (Our Flag). It is not a coincidence that the “Sport Enciklopédia” (Encyclopedia of Sport) published in the 1920s includes a separate chapter on scouting in connection with sports.

* University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, Institute for Human Development and Cultural Studies, Department of Cultural Studies; e-mail: varnagy.peter@pte.hu; ORCID iD: 0000-0001-8370-2443

** University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, Institute for Human Development and Cultural Studies, Department of Adult Education and Human Development; e-mail: szederkenyi.eva@pte.hu; ORCID iD: 0000-0002-9523-5878

Scouting both in Hungary and worldwide features characteristics related to sports and physical education. Its aim has been to educate boys to become good citizens through intense character training, physical exercise and practical skill development in line with the Scout Law and the so-called “Vow”. Unlike any other pedagogical form, this one is based on self-education. Thus, scouting is not complementary to school curriculum and does not consist primarily of sports or physical education, but it is a lifestyle.¹

It is worth mentioning that in the United States of the 1920s as many as 40 university departments focused on scout pedagogy. At the same time renowned Hungarian professors, including Sándor Karácsony, Sándor Sík and Pál Teleki, emphasised the pedagogical importance of scouting, too. According to them, scouting was not just a form but also a lifetime physical and mental program. In fact, in many countries of the world, scout laws attempted to generate everyday commitment to physical exercise in order to strengthen national consciousness and promote the idea of humanitarianism.

The Boy Scouts International Bureau was established in London in 1920 and decided that a regular World Scout Conference should be held biennially in different countries, with the first one organised in Paris (1922). The Danish Conference (1924) attracted delegates from as many as 34 nations, whereas delegates from 40 nations, including Hungary, participated in the conference in Switzerland (Kandersteg, 1926). As far as sports are concerned, it should be noted that the results of the World Scout Championship (Denmark, 1924) placed the United States at the top (181 points), followed by England (172 points) and Hungary (166 points).

The “Magyar Cserkész” (Hungarian Scout Magazine) devotes more than 20 pages to the program², spirit and success of the World Jamboree. Below is a summary table with national results from multiple sports categories.

As J.S. Wilson writes, “Hungarian Sea Scouts were present at a Sea Scout Rally held in the summer of 1927 at Helsingør in Denmark”.³ The rally took place on the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of Denmark’s Sea Scouting. The Hungarian Scouts finished with the highest score, which is especially noteworthy given that their competition including traditionally sea-faring nations such as the English, Danish and Germans. They brought home two silver and two crystal cups from this jubilee competition.

The described series of competitions draw our attention to the fact that, in addition to the mental development of young people, it was also their physical education that was pursued in Hungary. The origins of this approach date back to the 1910s, when the Hungarian Scouts under Sándor Sík—a priest, renowned poet, Catholic monk and university professor—organised a large-scale rafting event on the Vág (Váh) River, in which more than a hundred Hungarian scouts from 12 localities took part. This adventurous, difficult outing seems to have brought about the establishment of the Hungarian Sea Scouting in 1920 under

¹ H. Kunszt, 1928, p. 312.

² “Magyar Cserkész”, 8–9, 1924, p. 113–136.

³ J.S. Wilson, 1959, p. 81.

the direction of Gyula Zsembery. In the same year, Hungarian scouts sailed on the Danube and other Hungarian rivers (Sió, Kapos, Zala, Rába, Lajta) as well as on Lake Balaton for a total of about a thousand kilometres.

Table: Results of the World Scout Championship⁴

	Appearance	Camp skills	Singing, shouting	National dances	Campfire fun	Scouting Competition I.	Scouting Competition II. (Canoe)	Scout troops competition	24-hour scouting tour	Swimming	Encampment	All in all	Rank
Austria	13	13	18	12	11	9	9	13	14	18	12	142	6
Chile	15	13	10	7	10	10	4	10	0	0	12	91	11
Denmark	13	19	17	14	10	-	17	-	-	16	10	-	-
England	18	19	15	17	18	13	12	10	18	16	16	172	2
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	18*	-	-	13	-	-	-
France	15	15	9	13	12	13	13	10	14	12	10	136	8
Hungary	16 (6)	17 (2)	13 (5)	14 (4)	18 (1)	14 (1)	13*(2)	11 (8)	14 (5)	17 (2)	19 (1)	166	3
Italy	8	11	15	11	0	10	9	13	13	10	11	111	10
Luxemburg	10	10	5	0	11	7	10	0	0	12	10	75	12
Netherlands	16	16	5	15	12	10	13	15	12	11	10	135	9
Norway	19	16	9	7	17	12	15	17	14	14	18	158	4
Poland	17	17	13	15	12	10	15	13	15	10	18	155	5
Switzerland	18	9	14	6	18	9	11	14	15	10	15	139	7
USA	17	17	17	13	18	11	20*	18	20	16	14	181	1

Source: "Magyar Cserkész", 8–9, 1924, p. 130.

Famous authors have commented on the relationship between scouting and physical education. In his famous *Rovering to Success* (1959), Lord Baden-Powell describes sport as an important element of scouting, which plays an important role not only in the physical but also mental and spiritual life of every youngster. Moreover, Győző Temesy—a geographer, teacher, school director and scout leader—poses a couple of questions in relation to scouting in his article *The Power of Intelligence* from 1930, arguing that to train intelligence one needs to practice physical exercise and sports, but without too much passion.⁵

Sándor Imre, Hungary's Secretary of State and later Professor of Education in Szeged, wrote: "We look forward to reinforcing the impact of school education, promoting the physical and mental freshness and steady growth of the scout, and developing a sense of comradeship and brotherhood through living

⁴ "Magyar Cserkész", 8–9, 1924, p. 130.

⁵ Gy. Temesy, 1930, p. 352–353.

together in a variety of circumstances”⁶ Under the leadership of Sándor Sík, the Hungarian Scout Delegation participated in the International Conference of Scout Leaders in Paris (1922). This was especially significant as it was the first time that Hungarian press reported on scout sports. Hungarian commentators proudly announced that the youth’s personality and soul-body balance could develop truly harmoniously through sport. On the 25th anniversary of the founding of scouting, some of the same writers briefly summarised the influence of scouting on Hungarian society, including the ways in which scouting contributed to the institutionalisation of mass sports such as skiing and water sports.⁷

Scouting has always been based on the children’s need for self-realisation, their love of nature and their desire for companionship. One must hope that today’s scouting will raise well-performing Hungarian athletes and increase the number of young people following healthy lifestyles.

Bibliography

- Baden-Powell of Gilwell R., 2015, *Rovering to Success: A Book of Life-Sport for Young Men*, London.
- Hermann Gy. (ed.), 1920, “Magyar Cserkész” 1.
- Hermann Gy. (ed.), 1924, “Magyar Cserkész” 5.
- Kisbarnaki Farkas F., 1937, *A magyar cserkészlet útja 1910–37 (The Way of Hungarian Scouting 1910–37)*, Budapest.
- Kunszt H., 1928, *A cserkészlet (Scouting)* [in: *A sport enciklopédiája II. (The Encyclopedia of Sport II.)*], ed. György Pálffy, Budapest.
- Nyúl E.A., 2019, *Állampolgárságra nevelés a cserkészletben (Citizenship Education in Scouting)*, [in: *Tudományos eredmények a nagyvilágból (Scientific Results from around the World)*], ed. B. Tóth, Budapest, pp. 95–101.
- Pálffy Gy. (ed.), 1928, *A sport enciklopédiája I–II. (The Encyclopedia of Sport I–II.)*, Budapest.
- Temesy Gy., 1930, *Az intelligencia ereje (The Power of Intelligence)*, “Magyar Cserkész” 11 (14), pp. 352–353.
- Wilson J.S., 1959, *Scouting Round the World*, London.

⁶ “Magyar Cserkész”, 1, 1920, p. 2.

⁷ F. Kisbarnaki Farkas, 1937, p. 58.